



AVILA COLLEGE



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MICHAEL

*A Tale of the Masterful Monk*

*By OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY*

WILL MEN BE LIKE GODS?  
THE SHADOW ON THE EARTH  
THE MASTERFUL MONK  
PAGEANT OF LIFE  
THE COMING OF THE MONSTER  
THE TREMAYNES AND THE  
MASTERFUL MONK

These six books constitute the first six  
of the series of which *Michael, A Tale of  
the Masterful Monk* is the seventh.

# MICHAEL

*A Tale of the Masterful Monk*

BY

OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY

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MICHAEL

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PART I  
*MICHAEL*



## CHAPTER I

**H**E WATCHED, steadying himself by the rail above the companion-way.

The ship's lantern at the mast-head and the bows in the dimness ahead were lifting to meet the next mountain. The whiteness that was its summit towered gigantically, hovered, and then, almost miraculously, slid away beneath them. There was a sensation of poising before the downward plunge into the valley and the solid impact of water that left the liner shuddering. He could see the lower deck awash and a mill-race sweeping gunnels and bulkheads. Behind him the glass of the shelter was taking sheets of spray with the sound of bullets. He had found it wise to crouch low as they came.

He became aware of someone on his left, watching like himself the turbulence of the hurricane, and turned a dripping face. The other raised his hand to signify the futility of the human voice amidst these shrieking demons. The wind took advantage of his lost hold upon the rail and its force sent him staggering almost into the arms of the monk, who succeeded in keeping him on his feet. The other shouted his thanks, smiling apologetically, and became recognisable for the young man with the unapproachable manner and intriguingly romantic name.

And so Thornton met Michael St. Helier.

They made no attempt to talk, but remained immersed in the Atlantic turmoil. The monk indicated the stars looking down peacefully upon the tempestuous seas, with the crescent moon appearing and disappearing behind scurrying black patches of cloud. The young man studied the phenomenon appreciatively. A sheet of spray intervened, catching them before they could gain shelter.

It wasn't good enough.

They exchanged wet grins and retired inside. The young

man removed his raincoat. Thornton did likewise. They remained shaking them out until Michael St. Helier suggested drinks as a better pastime. They made their way unsteadily along the covered promenade. Thornton agreed to the garden-room. They gained it at the far end of the deck. The young man held open the swing-door for him to enter. The monk noted the ease of perfect manners.

Within there was comparative peace. They found a table in a corner. The young man pulled a chair into position for him, waited until he was seated, and then sat himself down opposite.

And the monk prepared to make acquaintance with Michael St. Helier.

They had attained the nodding stage yesterday. As far as Thornton knew he was the first to achieve even that; for the young man appeared to be studiously avoiding contact with his fellow-beings on board. Seemingly it was not snobbery, though the name rather prompted the notion; for this thoroughbred youth had deliberately avoided the snobbery associated with the Captain's table by refusing to sit there at all, though officially invited — so at least Thornton's cabin-steward had imparted. Instead, he sat in isolation at one of the few single tables the dining-room allowed. Thornton had decided that shyness too was unlikely, for Michael St. Helier's whole manner asserted the reverse. There was a quality of self-possession unlooked for in a young man of twenty; he could hardly be more.

Most young men would have started talking straight away. Michael St. Helier, having seated himself, observed unhurriedly the few people at the garden-room tables not confined by the hurricane to their cabins, before beckoning to the steward serving drinks. When the latter had taken their orders and retired, he contemplated leisurely an attractive green shrub in a tub nearby. Then he opened a cigarette-case and handed it across. They lit up in silence. Thornton was inclined for a moment to be amused, wondering if it were a pose. There was a seriousness about him, however, not quite in accord. A

slight frown was puckering his forehead as he leaned back and inhaled. He rested his elbows on the table rather suddenly, with his face between his hands:

"I'm wondering how to begin, Padre."

It was to be some confidence, then? Thornton recollected his impression of the young man's presence near him in the wilderness outside not being altogether accidental. He sat back, preparing himself to listen.

"May I tell you about myself?"

Thornton replied, "Yes, of course," half expecting an apology for the request to a complete stranger. Instead, he was informed in a matter of fact voice:

"I made up my mind as soon as I saw you."

The monk's eyebrows lifted. He had a vague remembrance of St. Helier cautiously studying him over the tables at dinner, on the first night. But they were four days out from England now? The delay was explained by the other adding: "I wanted to find out about you first, though. Father Thornton, you're a monk, I believe?"

"I'm a monk, yes."

The monk smiled encouragingly. The steward returned with the drinks, asked St. Helier for his cabin number, and departed with his tip.

"Were you out in the last war? You'd be about the age."

Thornton replied that he had been a Medical Officer to the Gunners in the last war, wondering what this had to do with telling him about himself.

"And you became a monk? I don't blame you."

Thornton laughed, uncertainly.

"You were in the last; but I'll damn well not be in the next," came with a sudden sharpness. It sounded fanatical. The monk affected not to notice it; he was not quite sure where the other was leading.

"The next?"

"More or less inevitable, isn't it?"

"Inevitable? That's rather a strong term, isn't it?"

There was a momentary contemplation of the attractive green shrub. He returned to the personal element:

"You were a Medico first? You probably know human nature fairly well?"

"I suppose I do. Yes."

They remembered their drinks. Over the top of his glass the young man's eyes watched him. He was being weighed up. It was rather intriguing and prompted Thornton to ask him his age.

"Twenty, I believe. Why?"

"Never mind. I was only speculating. . . You were going to tell me about yourself?"

"I've told you something already."

The monk smiled:

"That you're not over-fond of war?"

"Are you?"

"I loathe war," the monk replied, qualifying however with, "though there's something amazingly thrilling about it. To compensate, I suppose."

It was the qualification upon which Michael St. Helier fastened: "I'm sorry to disagree. Nothing compensates for hideousness."

It came out like an axiom, and gave Thornton an insight. The other had been steering for this, preliminary to telling him about himself; though, the purport of it he couldn't even guess. He ignored the contradiction and asked:

"Have you ever heard the war called the Great Adventure?"

"Not that I can remember."

Probably he hadn't. Twenty? He would have been born about the end of that holocaust.

"We called it that at the time. It was the Great Adventure for most of us. There was a strange sort of splendour — Does this interest you?"

"Oh yes, it interests me. Intensely. Please go on."

Thornton did so in spite of the cynical tone. He described an incident still vivid to his mind — his own battery caught in a V-shaped sector near Soissons and ordered to the gallop

under fire, the thrill of that wild thundering race, shelled the whole way; they had done it just in time, though at heavy cost in life. He took pains to make clear what he had meant by "splendour," aware of the other becoming restive and looking anything but thrilled. He ended rather flatly with, "You can call it hideous, but the splendour's there."

Michael St. Helier's composure suddenly left him:

"The splendour of bloodiness! What damned nonsense! That's merely shutting your eyes to it." His manners were leaving him too. Thornton said quietly:

"A medical officer could hardly shut his eyes to the bloodiness. You're rather wide of the mark, aren't you?" He had seen the youth of England blasted into shapeless things of horror, and told him so. The other winced. He looked about restlessly and then lit another cigarette.

"How the devil are you going to stop war with all this 'splendid' stuff and heroics?"

Thornton said deliberately:

"I'm not talking about stopping war. I'm telling a young man of twenty who's never been in a war, about a certain side of it, because he asked me if I was fond of war. I loathe war, but I'm not going to pretend that there are no 'splendid stuff' and heroics, with all due deference to the young man of twenty. Anyway . . . you were letting me —— you were going to tell me about yourself?"

There was no response. Michael St. Helier sat there looking at his empty glass.

"Have another — with me?" Thornton invited him.

"No thanks."

Thornton sat back, uncertain as to what the "No thanks" meant.

"You rather asked for the snub, didn't you?"

"Oh, I'm not objecting to that," came bluntly. He buried his head in his hands. Thornton waited. This composed young man whose composure had vanished so inexplicably, was pondering something, he concluded. He watched him. The hands arrested his attention — long, fine-shaped hands, saved

from effeminacy by the breadth across the knuckles. Capable, nervous hands. The head between them was shapely. He had noticed that already, and the permanently ruffled dark hair — at least, he had never seen it other than ruffled. He wasn't sure about the features, for the moment hidden; but the eyes, he had decided, were most definitely attractive. Enigmatical brown depths — almost a woman's eyes, their dreaminess at variance with the virile physique his width of shoulder suggested; and strangely at variance with this abrupt contradictoriness he had roused. He didn't quite know what he had roused. He had merely expressed an opinion, and promptly evoked opposition. . . Temperamental? It looked like it for all his composure of manner. The absurdity of it struck Thornton — sitting like this with a young man who had taken four days before approaching him on presumably some intimate matter, and then almost immediately taken offence —

"I'm frankly disappointed in you, Padre."

The head had raised itself. The angry light had gone from his eyes, but there was genuine distress in the look that met his own.

"I'm sorry," Thornton said. "Tell me why."

"I'd expected something different from a monk."

Thornton leaned over:

"Look here, young man, don't be so premature."

He would have put him down then and there for a consummate prig, if the assertion hadn't sounded so sincere. "A monk can have his opinions. I've stated a fact. You don't like it. Right. We'll leave it alone."

"But I refuse to accept it as a fact," came determinedly.

Thornton kept his patience:

"What, that there's nothing splendid about war? Men going over the top — to death? A gun-crew sticking it to the last? Possibly because you've never seen that kind of thing."

"My God! Splendid!"

He seemed to be altogether lacking in imagination. . . He'd expected something different from a monk? The impli-

cation, coupled with that deliberate steering him on to war, was sufficiently plain:

"You've really been sounding me, haven't you — for some particular purpose of your own?"

Michael St. Helier hesitated for a moment, and then admitted it with an ungracious nod.

"Do you mind my asking why?"

The other muttered to the effect that it was reasonable to sound a man on his sympathies before broaching personal matters.

"Then there's something wanting in my — sympathies?"

"I'd sooner not answer that. It might sound rude."

Thornton smiled as pleasantly as he could:

"You're rather a tantalising person, aren't you?"

Instead of mollifying, it brought him flaring out:

"I don't need humouring! . . . Yes, I *did* expect something different from a monk! Splendid, glorious war! Slaughtered and gassed and blasted to bits! I loathe everything to do with it! And, if possible, I loathe war-mongering more! And I'm not a schoolboy airing ——"

"Do you mind lowering your voice?" Thornton interrupted.  
"People can hear."

It held him up for a moment. The request had its effect. He controlled himself sufficiently to assert in a quieter tone: "I'm not a schoolboy airing half-baked opinions. They're convictions I've formed for myself, and they mean everything to me. I'd not expect the great British public that gloats on wars and horrors to subscribe to them, but I —— I'd at least expect that a monk ——"

He stopped short.

"Please, go on."

Silence.

"Was that what you were going to tell me about yourself?"

Silence.

Thornton finished his drink. The other appeared to be coming to some decision.

"No, it wasn't. I was going to \_\_\_\_\_" He broke off again, "There's no point in it now. You'd not understand."

It left Thornton at a loss.

"Oh, well . . ."

There seemed to be nothing more to say. The outburst had been so beside the point that it wasn't worth answering. It would be futile to attempt it with a man whose mind wasn't open to reason. He seemed obsessed by one notion, and wouldn't even listen. . . Michael St. Helier suddenly settled the matter himself:

"Goodnight, Padre. I'll turn in, if you don't mind."

He rose, made his way through the tables to the door with what dignity the rolling of the ship allowed, and disappeared from sight.

Thornton was left staring after him.

## CHAPTER II

THE MONK regarded the few straggling lines he had written with dissatisfaction. The straggling was due to the liner's motion, the meagreness to Michael St. Helier still simmering in the background of his mind to the detriment of concentration.

They were headed, "Congress. New Zealand."

He read them through.

"Rotten. . . Definitely rotten."

He knew when to tear up stuff, and proceeded to do so with this. He also knew when not to push himself to write. The first four of the Congress addresses he had finished before leaving England. There was ample time for the remaining two. He was unaccustomed to the luxury of six weeks, or whatever it was to the Antipodes, in which to write two addresses.

He had looked forward almost greedily to this voyage across two oceans. To enquiries he had replied that he was being deported from England to wander about the world for the ruin of souls, and, by specific invitation, the souls of New Zealanders, Australians, South Sea Islanders, Jamaicans and Americans. . . He picked up from the cabin desk before him a bunch of letters clipped together, mostly from Bishops and priests, some from an American Lecture Bureau, fingering them and smiling to himself. He had an alarmingly big program before him.

The sharp lash of spray against the porthole above him drew his eyes to the same.

It was through that porthole five nights ago that he had watched the lights of London slipping away as the liner moved slowly down the Thames estuary before casting off her tugs. A slight quivering of his cabin had told him when she was under her own steam. It had intensified into rhythmic tremors, and then into the steady throb of engines. There was a sense

of finality about those deep pulsations. He was committed to it now — this new adventure. He had watched the shore lights receding with a certain wistfulness tempered with anticipation. He would be away at least a year. He had watched next morning with that same wistfulness the panorama of the Southern coast sliding by — Brighton, Hastings, Bournemouth, familiar places he had lectured in, their houses and churches clearly visible in the January sunshine across the dancing waters . . . later, the lights of Torquay and Plymouth — he knew them too. . . Then night and the open Atlantic.

They had run into bad weather yesterday. This morning it was a "Half gale." By lunch it was a "Gale." By dinner it was definitely a "Full gale."

He had picked up with a few people already. There seemed to be quite a number of Catholics on board; they turned up well in the mornings for his Mass in the Lounge. There was a Robert Curtin, a Canadian, who shared with him his table in the dining-room, genial and amusing, returning via Australia and California, from business in England. There was a Doctor Judd, ship's doctor for the passage; also his wife. A friendly warm-hearted pair. There were others, less interesting, with whom he had exchanged courtesies.

And then there was Michael St. Helier.

Whose strange conduct just now had bewildered him. The young man who kept aloof and sat in isolation, whom he had caught studying him over the tables with those dreamy attractive eyes.

The son of a "Viscount St. Helier" he had learned from his cabin-steward who seemed to know everything about everybody on board. He remembered vaguely a Viscount St. Helier being attacked by a Labour M.P. The cabin-steward had corroborated and supplemented this — the attack had been on the grounds of inordinate wealth, culled from royalties on coal mines under the St. Heliers' Yorkshire estate, and the Viscount's objectionable references to the "lower orders" in a newspaper. The cabin-steward had been informative about Michael St. Helier himself, or rather about his unsociable behaviour

already occasioning comment on board, towards some obviously aspiring young ladies in particular: "Nothing doing, if you ask me, sir." Thornton hadn't asked him, but it was a safe opinion. Michael St. Helier was exhibiting no interest whatever in the "Band of Hope," the steward's name for them, or for that matter in anybody on board.

Except a monk.

And even that was dubious now.

He looked at his watch. It was close on eleven.

A couple of hours ago they had spoken for the first time. Half an hour afterwards Michael St. Helier had walked out on him; at least that was what it came to. He had been turned down.

It wouldn't have been so absurd if the other hadn't elaborated on his preliminaries to approaching him, implying some confidence of import. Thornton didn't know now quite what had happened, beyond that he had patently offended him. His allusion, for at the outset it had been no more, to a fairly common experience associated with war, had immediately been jumped on, barely allowed any explanation, and his attempted justification virtually met with a blank refusal.

It was the singular unreasonableness of it—a practical stranger deciding to confide in him, choosing the occasion himself, sounding him straight away on a point more or less extraneous which he had deliberately raised himself, and then taking offence because—

Because a monk had maintained a fact of common experience? He had expected something different from a monk? It might have been something immoral he had been maintaining instead of a relative trifle. The other couldn't even agree to differ and leave it alone. For all his manifest breeding his manners had gone to the winds; St. Helier had told him in so many words that he was a person in whom he no longer wished to confide. Thornton wondered what it was that he had been going to confide. About himself? That had necessitated sounding his sympathies first? And had taken him four days to—

The monk became aware, first subconsciously, then consciously, of some interruption. There was a change in the creaking of the cabin. He sat up suddenly alert. His razor-case on the chest of drawers fell with a smack on the floor. There was a crash in the cabin overhead. As his chair began to slide it came to him that the liner was no longer pitching, but rolling heavily instead. He went to the door, opened it and listened. There were others appearing at their doors. He saw his cabin-steward coming along, maintaining his balance with difficulty, but smiling reassuringly. There was nothing wrong, he informed them; the liner was changing her course and for the moment they were running broadside to the seas. An American very green in the face asked in a constricted voice what the "big idea" was, and then, without waiting for an answer, abruptly disappeared from sight, leaving the rest to the imagination.

Thornton moved inside for the steward to enter. He closed the door behind him. The reassuring smile had gone. Thornton was given the facts. From what the steward had been able to glean, they were making for a French cargo boat some twenty miles to the north-east. The SOS from the same, if picked up correctly, meant plainly a race against time for a vessel drifting with a broken propeller. Having imparted this much, the cabin-steward left him, in search of further gleanings.

Thornton returned to his chair. The rolling had eased to an extent.

Twenty miles? He supposed they would be doing about ten knots in this sea. They should be on the scene, presuming they found her, somewhere about one or two in the morning. He decided not to go to bed. The rolling in any case would not be conducive to sleep. And, should lives be in danger, he might be needed.

He had an idea that these things were not made known, in a general way, on board, and found himself wondering whether Michael St. Helier knew.

Drifting with a broken propeller? In these raging seas?

At 2 a.m. Thornton was leaning against the starboard taffrail of A deck, a solitary muffled up figure, watching the liner's searchlight sweeping the blackness around. There were a couple of men talking together within the glass-shelter, watching like himself. The crescent moon had vanished, and the hurricane's force was decreasing, for the fore-deck below was no longer awash.

He had come up at intervals during the last two hours, to be informed each time that nothing had been seen as yet. This time sounds had caught his ear above the whistling of the wind; he had climbed a companion-way to the boat-deck above and had a look. There were men standing about. A rocket apparatus was in readiness with a large coil of cord nearby. Two of the crew were testing a winch, hoisting a boat from its davits and lowering and raising by turns; another was greasing the pulleys. It was all being done unhurriedly and with the peculiar indifference of the British seaman, as though it were a nightly job to answer the SOS of a ship in distress. On his descent he had encountered the Captain waiting to come up.

"Hullo, Padre!"

The Captain had pointed with assumed severity to a notice, "Officers and crew only." Thornton had apologised for not ascertaining beforehand whether the Captain was about, and asked what were the prospects of the search. The prospects were damnable, he learned. The Captain's eye followed the sweep of the searchlight as he gave his unofficial opinion that it might be dawn before anything could be seen—if by then there was anything to see; he believed the latitude had been picked up correctly, in which case the cargo boat should have been found before now; they had combed an area of some miles. The implication was clear enough—in the Captain's belief the cargo boat had gone down. They were just standing-by on the chance of something, then? The Captain had advised him to go to bed, and then gone up to the boat-deck himself.

That was half an hour ago, and he had not yet taken the

advice. He was beginning to feel the cold, and began pacing up and down. It was another muffled up figure that brought him to a halt. Someone else was sharing his vigil on A deck, further along, shading his eyes from a roof-light to follow the searchlight's sweep. He was hatless, and it was the tousled hair Thornton recognised.

So Michael St. Helier knew, and had come up to investigate?

If the young man had seen him he gave no sign. Thornton wasn't sure what he should do. The other had left him in the garden-room in a way which could hardly be misconstrued — further talk was undesirable. Under the circumstances he couldn't very well make overtures, although the situation was stupid enough in all conscience. He wondered if the same was striking St. Helier, who had now looked in his direction and seen him. . .

The liner's siren was suddenly blasting into the night. At the same moment a second searchlight came into play. The monk went quickly to the side and looked; the beam of it was coming from below and was focussed on the waters nearby. Next minute he had seen it — that something for the chance of which they had been standing-by.

He was aware of Michael St. Helier drawing nearer and peering in the direction too, and at the same moment of the throb of propellers reversing. A whistle went, followed by the heavy revolving of the winch. The boat that had been in readiness was lowering; he could hear above the wind the Captain megaphoning orders.

It came down, swinging, manned by a number of the crew, the speed with which it was being done witnessing to the service of that long stand-by.

They were dropping below the level of A deck. He could see their faces caught by the deck-lights, grim-looking with pursed lips. He had seen that look before, at the front — of men about to challenge death, who knew it. . .

A grip on his arm made him turn. Michael St. Helier was at his side, unaware apparently of his involuntary action.

It was not so much the grip on his arm that startled Thornton as the look on the other's face.

For a moment he was unable to account for it.

There was no personal danger.

St. Helier's whole being was recoiling. From the sight of that boatload being dropped into the seething cauldron below.

Why on earth had the man come up?

He would have to remain now; he could hardly turn his back on what was happening, and passengers were crowding the taffrail hemming them in. The news had spread with uncanny rapidity.

The boat had hit the water and they were struggling fiercely to prevent her being crashed against the side, dipping oars sharply to the coxswain's quick shouts, two of them thrusting with boat-hooks, fighting to head her away. They had almost succeeded, but a furrow next moment engulfed them, and on the rise they were caught and swept circling.

There were stifled cries from the deck as they saw it—the impact and snapping of oars. It had saved the boat, however, for the oars had taken the force of it. The service of that long stand-by was again evidenced in the forethought for every emergency. Spare oars were being raised and dropped into rowlocks as the boat-hooks thrust her nose round once more. There was a moment of horrid suspense in which they made no perceptible headway; then a cheer rang out from the deck. Those grim-looking men with pursed lips had done it and were getting away.

The beam of the searchlight shortened in and played for a moment on the boat, showing up white faces between sheets of spray; then passed on ahead slowly, a dancing pathway on the turbulent waters giving to the coxswain his direction.

St. Helier had moved forward slightly. The monk glanced sideways at his profile beneath the ruffled hair blowing in the wind; he was watching as though under some compulsion, in a nervous fascinated way. It flashed upon Thornton—did this young man, for whom nothing was "splendid" in war,

see anything splendid in this? This fight for the lives of others being waged before his very eyes?

For it was that and no less for those men. There was more than the wreckage from the cargo boat tossing pathetically on the waters on which the other searchlight was now steadied; the monk had seen it already, revealed by that powerful white beam — figures precariously huddled on what from this distance appeared to be some sort of raft.

The watchers on deck had gone silent, and remained so as the boat neared the spot on its perilous mission of rescue. Baulks of timber were swirling about, assuming in the glare the appearance of weird monsters menacing its approach. They could see the boat-hooks warding them off. The superb risk of what they were witnessing was borne in upon the monk — that diminutive-looking boat pitching on the vast waste of the Atlantic, white specks that were faces caught by the light. It seemed humanly impossible they could succeed. And terribly possible that the raging cruelty of the ocean — He sent a swift prayer to heaven.

St. Helier shifted restlessly at his side and muttered something the monk didn't catch; he was plainly hating it, yet forcing himself to stay and see it out.

The meaning of those ugly monsters, now multiplying rapidly, was becoming plain — a cargo of baulk timbers from the sunken vessel, coming to the surface, some of them shooting up and falling sideways, aggravating the peril, one with the arms and legs of a body dangling grotesquely which slipped off and disappeared.

There was a stir of relief on deck as the boat was seen clearing the timbers. Then a solitary baulk came, swept on the crest of a wave, and caught her bows, thrusting up violently over the gunnel and pinning down one of the crew. There was another horrid moment of suspense before it slipped off, releasing the capsizing boat of its weight. They saw the boat right itself, but there was a huddled form instead of an oarsman at his place.

The coxswain was leaning forward and, by his gestures,

urging them to make it whilst the path was clear to their goal. One of the two with the boat-hooks was taking the vacant place at the oars. . .

The tensity suddenly snapped, and a volley of cheering broke out for those grim-looking men with pursed lips.

They had made it.

And those forlorn figures were still clinging on. . .

### CHAPTER III

THORNTON decided it was time to defend him. He couldn't very well sit still and hear Michael St. Helier referred to as a "prig" and a "snob." They hadn't actually called him a coward, but Robert Curtin had hinted that it was the epithet being applied to him on board.

It probably was.

After that pitiful episode the other night. Only a few could have actually witnessed it; but on board ship things had a habit of spreading.

There was no disguising it—Michael St. Helier had made a pitiable exhibition of himself. Thornton had regretted not getting him away ever since, instead of letting him remain there and witness that ugly ending. For those grim-looking men had failed with victory virtually in their grasp—caught by an uprush of baulks, the boat practically battered to bits with its load of rescued survivors, three alone saved of the crew.

It had been heartrending for every witness of it, that fight for life and then that pitiless engulfment—the monk's sole consolation the absolution he had breathed as the waters closed in upon them.

St. Helier had no longer been at his side when he turned, after seeing the three picked up by a second boat. He had looked about and then seen him, standing in the glare of a deck-light, his face distorted with horror. He had pushed his way through the crowd with the intention of leading him away. It had been too late, though. The hysterical outburst had come before he could get there, the wild incoherency of a nerve-storm. He had gripped him firmly and succeeded in getting him away and down to his own cabin. St. Helier had sat on his bunk, his head buried in his hands, still trembling in every limb.

It had been so dreadfully un-British. . . Not a witness of the

tragedy but must have felt it acutely; there had been a hush throughout the whole boat next day. The Captain, hardened seaman, had felt it terribly (he had come to Thornton's cabin after it was all over); they might every man of them have been his own sons. It was not so much the pathos of it with Michael St. Helier, but the horror. He had taken it quite irrationally, hopelessly thrown off his balance.

The monk had said very little to him at the moment; to reason with him in that state would have been futile. And he was by no means certain as to what lay behind this un-manning hypersensitiveness, beyond that it appeared to be psychological rather than physical. He was glad he hadn't, for St. Helier of his own accord had appeared in his cabin next morning, altogether calmer and very humbled. He had thanked him for "last night," whatever that meant. He had also apologised for "what had happened" and then rather uncomfortably for "my behaviour" in the garden-room; he had not meant it for rudeness but realised now that it was. By the manner of the apology he had implied that he intended to confide in him after all, presumably when he felt he could do so. It had all been quite brief, and Thornton had told him to come and see him any time he liked. Anything further would have to come from himself, that was clear.

That had been two days ago, Tuesday. To-day was Thursday and so far nothing had transpired. St. Helier appeared at meals and occasionally on deck. Thornton had observed him at lunch just now, eating at his solitary table, with a book propped up before him. Outwardly he was the same self-possessed being as before. There was nothing to indicate that he was aware of the comment on board. Thornton's cabin-steward had first informed him of it. Robert Curtin had now enlightened him as to the nature of that comment; he had already listened to Dr. Judd alluding to St. Helier as "that young prig" and Mrs. Judd calling him a snob. There had been nothing malicious about it, and Thornton had to admit to himself that it was only what St. Helier had asked for.

Still . . .

He looked round the Lounge where they were sitting. Robert Curtin had rather a loud voice and there were others present. He asked them quietly whether they were being quite fair to young St. Helier.

Mrs. Judd shrugged her shoulders remarking that a young man who behaved like St. Helier could hardly escape criticism.

"Possibly not," Thornton replied to her. "But a man's not a snob merely because he chooses to sit at a table by himself."

Dr. Judd disliked his whole manner: "Hang it, Padre, I'm the ship's doctor, but that young cub looks at me as if I didn't exist."

"He's probably unaware that ships' doctors exist," Thornton told him. "I don't know about his 'whole manner,' but his manners can be — irreproachable."

Robert Curtin confessed that he'd noticed St. Helier opening her cabin-door for an old lady most courteously. "All the same, Padre —"

"All the same, what?"

Robert Curtin, whose kindness about others was marked, hesitated, and then remarked in his Colonial drawl: "Wal, Padre, I guess he don't apologise for himself. And I reckon he wants a bit of explainin'."

"Maybe. But there's no obligation to go about with the explanation of oneself on a placard."

"Padre," said Dr. Judd, "if you're holding a brief for him you're up against the opinion of the boat."

"The opinion of the boat?" Thornton smiled. "You mean they see the name of Michael St. Helier on the passenger list and decide to make his acquaintance, and, having failed to do so, decide that he's a snob; and when he behaves in an incomprehensible manner on deck of all places, they further decide he's a coward — knowing nothing whatsoever about him."

Dr. Judd gulped. Robert Curtin was chuckling to himself.

"Does that include us?" Mrs. Judd asked.

"I'm not specifying; but a young Apollo with a wealthy father, who won't mix, must be a bitter disappointment."

"I think you're odious," she retorted.

Thornton acknowledged it with a grin.

"Listen, Padre," Robert Curtin leaned across to him. "You're defendin' him — wal, that's fine. But I'm reckonin' Archangel Michael St. Helier'll want more than defendin' before this voyage is out. We got a horseplay crowd on this boat — same as all these boats — and we don't wan' 'em to be doin' something about it."

Thornton regarded him questioningly. "We?" His eyes went to Dr. Judd and then to his wife. He was beginning to understand.

"I'm sorry if I've been dull," he said. "But this is really a sort of family gathering, isn't it? With an object?"

"Wal, we thought we'd hand it to you, so you could pass it on."

"I see."

There was an uncomfortable wait. Thornton played about with an ash-tray on the table. . . So they'd got him into the Lounge, not really for the purpose of attacking St. Helier, but to sting him into action on behalf of the young man he was trying to defend. Robert Curtin in his dry Colonial way had directed his attention to a possibility he couldn't quite ignore. He'd never even contemplated —

"Is there any trouble likely? I'm not sure what you mean."

Robert Curtin sat up.

"D'you know what a boob means?"

"Oh, yes."

"Wal, Archangel Michael — that's what they call him — he's the boob on this boat, ready made. They've not to go lookin' for one —"

"They? That's rather indefinite?"

"It might've bin indefinite if he'd not done that cissy stuff on deck and I'd not heard 'em talkin' round the bar. D'you get me?"

"Well, I know that drinking crowd. They've been talkin'?"

"It's goin' to be more than talk, Padre, unless you can knock a bit of sense into that young man's head, and tell him to

come out of that superior shell of his, and do a bit of mixin' with the folk on board. It wouldn't matter in a hotel, but this ent a hotel — it's a boat, and we're all as good as one another; at least, that's what's expected."

Thornton said, "Um," and then:

"And it's expected of me — to do it?"

"Because you're the only one that's done any contactin' so far; there's no one else got within a mile of him."

So they knew that? It was amazing how things got about on board.

"I've had a couple of encounters with him, not entirely successful. He approached me about a private matter. But I don't know that it gives me the right ——"

"I'm tellin' you, that's all," Robert Curtin cut in firmly. He looked at Doctor and Mrs. Judd as if seeking their approval of his spokesmanship. He had it apparently, for Dr. Judd said with a note of finality:

"Nobody wants to butt in, Padre; but it's for that young ass's sake. It's up to you, or he'll get what's coming to him."

It seemed to be more or less arranged already. Thornton played about with the ash-tray again.

"Very well, I'll think about it. I think I'll probably do so. Does that satisfy you?"

"Okay by me," Robert Curtin replied. The other two smiled agreement.

"And you're not sore about it — the family puttin' you wise?"

"Not at all. Thank you for doing so. I knew he was disliked, but it hadn't occurred to me that there might be trouble. Er — may I be allowed to put the family wise?"

"We're listenin'," said Robert Curtin.

"I've not been defending him simply because —— well, out of decency, if you like, because it happened to be myself he came to. Actually, I've had to keep my temper with him; I needn't tell you over what, but for a moment I was tempted to put him down as a blatant prig. I don't know whether you'll believe me, but I doubt if he could be a prig if he tried;

he's in too deadly earnest over things. It certainly wasn't a prig who broke down in my cabin like a child, and I don't think there's any harm in mentioning it."

"When was that, Padre?" There was a note of incredulity in Dr. Judd's voice. Thornton told him with a nod at Robert Curtin—after that "cissy stuff" on deck. "I doubt if it was cissy stuff, though."

Dr. Judd said he hadn't seen it happen himself, but from what he'd heard it was a fairly good imitation.

"It was. But I don't think it was cowardice."

"What'd you call it, then?"

Thornton considered for a moment.

"I'm not sure. Tension? He's inordinately sensitive, and I'd say it was psychological rather than physical; wedged in by that crowd and couldn't very well get away; bad form to turn his back on those men. I had the impression — Does this interest you?"

"Go on, Padre."

"He was close by me all the time, and I had the impression that he was hating every minute of it, but forcing himself to stay. Anyway, that ugly thing happened — and he snapped. . . . Cowardice is an easy word to fling about when it's one of the things that's not done. I'd not judge him by the usual standards personally, because he has an altogether irrational attitude to horrors. I know that for a fact, apart from that exhibition of himself."

Dr. Judd grunted meditatively.

"You're not making a case out of charity?"

"No, I'm not," Thornton asserted. "I'm giving you what little I know about him."

Dr. Judd grunted again, and asked whether St. Helier had said anything about it himself, since.

"He apologised for what happened. That was next morning, and he was in an abjectly humbled mood. . . . Doc, wouldn't a prig be more likely to assert himself to recover his self-respect?"

Dr. Judd answered the question by stating that he'd not

noticed anything very chastened or humbled about young St. Helier.

"You can't go by that manner of his. It's inherent in him. Upbringing probably. . . It's his manner that puts you off really?"

Dr. Judd nodded, admitting it. He smiled to himself and turned to Robert Curtin:

"Got that, Curtin—a psychological case with an inherent manner? Can you get that across the boat?"

"Wal, I said he wants a bit of explainin', and if you ent got anything better, Robert Curtin'll try it round the bar and see what happens."

Mrs. Judd offered to try it on the "lower orders" on board. Thornton didn't see the allusion until she added for his benefit:

"You've heard of Viscount St. Helier? You referred to his father just now."

"Yes. My cabin-steward gave me the parentage." He asked her whether it was generally known that that particular personage was his father. She believed that it was.

"Oh?" It wouldn't do him much good; although a man could hardly be blamed for his father. Robert Curtin began filling a pipe:

"If the family's put wise now, I'll be doin' my four times round. And if I meet any lower orders I'll give 'em the psychological uplift; and, Padre, you'll be helpin' the Archangel get down from his perch. What are you doin' about it, Doc?"

Dr. Judd said he would be doing the repairs when the horseplay crowd had finished with young St. Helier.

## CHAPTER IV

THORNTON noticed her looking again at that lonely figure further along. She was doing it surreptitiously, interestedly, and not, he thought, from mere curiosity.

He knew who she was; she was at his Mass every morning. He had only spoken to her once so far, and that was on a morning he had been unable to say Mass, when the gale was at its height. He had gone to the Lounge in case any Catholics turned up, and found her waiting there. She had looked up hopefully, but he had told her he couldn't risk it with the Chalice, and seen her look of disappointment.

She was a Miss St. Laurence.

Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence, the cabin-steward had supplemented. The name had intrigued him and he had found himself murmuring grandiosely, "Michael St. Helier" . . . "Gabrielle St. Laurence," and smiling to himself apparently, for the steward, engaged in replacing towels, had remarked to his reflection in the mirror on the coincidence of a *Miss Archangel* on board, and then sighed ostentatiously: "Well, you never know, sir. . . Not that she's Band of Hope — last chancers they are. If you ask me, sir, Miss St. Laurence — — —"

"Gibson, I'm not asking you," he had interrupted. The unabashed Gibson had continued fiddling with the towels, until: "Yessir, there's plenty of girls on these boats — we call them Woolworths, going cheap if you understand. Now, Miss St. Laurence, she's — — —" "Quite so, Gibson"

The cabin-steward's discrimination, however, showed a certain nicety of perception. There was that indefinable quality of breed about Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence as with Michael St. Helier the unapproachable. Unlike that strange young man, though, she was not proving unapproachable, he had noticed. In a quiet way, she was collecting round her, not

young men, but a miscellany of older and less obtrusive persons. Thornton had observed this with interest; the majority of her sex on board gave the impression of regarding the voyage as potential for romance to be grabbed at all costs. She gave no sign of regarding it in that light, and it could scarcely be from lack of opportunity; for he was human enough to appreciate that Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence was an extremely attractive young lady.

He was appreciating it now. Ostensibly she was studying the Atlantic, leaning with an elbow on the taffrail. Actually she was studying the solitary figure of Michael St. Helier in a deck-chair with a book. She had been doing so for at least ten minutes. Thornton had seen her head turn at intervals, and her eyes resting thoughtfully on him; he could hardly help seeing it, seated only three yards behind, of which she was blissfully unaware.

The delicately chiselled profile came into view once more. This time her eyes rested on the young man more deliberately, as if she were coming to some decision. She stood up from her leaning position.

Thornton felt slightly uncomfortable and intrusive. It would be fairer to make his presence known. . . He took the pipe out of his mouth and tapped the bowl noisily on the seat.

At the sound she started and turned. When she saw who it was she began laughing.

"Father, you're dreadful!"

"I'm sorry," he said. "But it was time to do something about it."

She looked charmingly embarrassed.

"How long have you been here?"

"Considerably before an elegant young lady draped herself over the taffrail and enhanced the view."

"Obstructed? I'm sorry. I didn't see you."

"Probably not. There're more interesting things about."

She regarded him half suspiciously.

"Yes, the sea's glorious. It's the first blue sea we've had."

He agreed, "Yes, the sea's glorious. In fact, it's a glorious view all round."

She was laughing again and colouring.

"Father, you're disgraceful. . . May I come and sit down?"

"Do. I'll look at the sea."

She came and settled herself on his left.

"This is an intervention of Providence," she told him. "I was going to do an appalling thing."

"I noticed that."

"What, that I was going to go and talk to him?"

"There was every indication of it."

She paused.

"Shall we be serious? . . . I'm so dreadfully sorry for him. They say you're the only person he speaks to, Father."

Thornton turned to her.

"You're sorry for him?"

"Yes, I am — very. What really happened that night?"

"Were you there?" he asked.

"Yes, but I couldn't see much of what was going on; there was such a crowd. I saw the men getting them off, but not that ghastly thing happening — the boat going down. They started clearing the deck of women; I didn't — I saw you taking him away, that was all. . . What was it? They're calling him a coward."

There was sincere distress in the clear blue eyes that met his own.

"I know," he replied. "It's the easy word to use."

He decided to tell her what he had told the Judds and Robert Curtin, and did so. She listened quietly.

"He apologised for breaking down?"

"For involving me in it, I think. Having to get him away and all that."

"He didn't admit it was cowardice, himself?"

"Well, no. He hardly could; he wasn't responsible. He was ashamed over making an exhibition of himself. It wasn't cowardice in the ordinary sense at all. There was no personal danger to himself."

She looked away over the sea.

"They're not ostracising him, are they? He sits at that table by himself."

That was his own choice, Thornton believed. St. Helier had done that from the start.

"Why doesn't he behave more sociably?"

Thornton couldn't say why; he'd never been given even an inkling.

"It's not shyness?"

"As far as I can judge, it's nothing to do with that. There's nothing shy about him when he's talking with you. He's unusually self-possessed."

Her eyes travelled to where Michael St. Helier at a safe distance was composedly reading in his deck-chair, oblivious of being discussed. He was lolling back with a knee sticking up and a white buckskin shoe resting on a bar of the taffrail.

"It's that cool manner of his after behaving like that that seems to annoy people," she remarked.

"So I understand. Do they want him to go about groveling?"

Her eyes turned at his tone.

"Then you don't think any the worse of him for it?"

"I should certainly be uncharitable if I did."

She exclaimed impulsively:

"Father, isn't it a pity to let him —— Couldn't we do something?"

He studied her, smiling to himself.

"If I may say so, you might have been doing it by now, if ——"

"If Providence hadn't intervened?"

"—— if Providence hadn't been alive to possibilities."

"Why, what possibilities?"

"The Apollo in the deck-chair habitually discourages advances, I am informed."

"But, my dear Father, I wasn't ——"

"No, but it might be disastrous if he thought so."

"Oh dear! Do I look like that?"

"Not in the least: only I'm not sure whether the unconventional approach would work. Our Michael is a most meticulous young man."

He told her — the first thing that had struck him was the perfectly correct manners, the second that they could suddenly go to the winds; it might be asking for it to dispense with formalities.

"Oh?"

She looked again at the Apollo established so seclusively in the deck-chair.

"No, he doesn't exactly invite approach."

Thornton suggested:

"It may be protective colouring, partly."

"Protective colouring?"

Thornton began laughing.

"My dear innocent young lady, you'll have to guess."

"Oh . . . Really, Father!"

She began laughing in her turn.

"Of course, he has got nice eyes. . . Yes, they'd find him attractive."

It was so impersonal as to assure him that her interest was purely humane.

"Miss St. Laurence, you said — couldn't we do something? So, listen."

He screwed round, facing her:

"I've been trying to put myself in his position. You've heard of his father of course; everybody has?"

She nodded.

"Very well. That's his son with those disgustingly good looks, a family tree behind him and heaven knows how much money in front of him. Think it out."

"In terms of candidates?"

"Yes. And designing mothers."

"And despairing daughters?" she contributed. "But what's this to do with it?"

"Indirectly, quite a lot." He told her, "I was shepherded, quite politely, into the Lounge yesterday, after lunch, by the

Judds and Robert Curtin — you know them, I believe. They were quite nice about it, but they retailed for my benefit the general opinion on board of Viscount St. Helier's son, hinted at possible trouble, and then assigned me the unpleasant task of tackling him, as the only person who has any contact with him."

"Well, couldn't you?"

"Wait a minute. I put up the best defence for him I could — allowance had to be made for his upbringing, etcetera, his father's a notorious snob, also there was no need to assume cowardice if a man snaps under tension. They didn't seem particularly convinced. Still, I promised to do what I could."

"I'm so glad."

"You'll see what I'm driving at in a moment. I told them he was a psychological case. You've heard of inhibitions and phobias?"

"I've heard of them, yes."

"I've no clue to his particular complex, beyond the fact that he has a loathing for horrors. We all have, but he's got a superlative dose; I discovered that straight off. It horrified everybody, that boat going down, but it didn't throw them off their balance. He was horror-struck, in the literal sense, and it *did* throw him completely off his balance for the time being. That's merely what happened though."

Thornton thought for a moment.

"I was trying to worry him out last night — how a young man of twenty could achieve it, the combination . . . that cool, self-possessed manner and then abruptly going to bits; it's not the first time it's happened, which is about all I got out of him afterwards."

"Oh?"

"He was hemmed in against the taffrail. It probably set up panic conditions."

"What, for the phobia to —— whatever a phobia does?"

"It does an uprush. It did. I couldn't get there in time. Anyway . . . It's his contradictory behaviour. I mentioned

his manners suddenly going to the winds. That was in the garden-room a few evenings ago; I happened, quite inadvertently, to rub his phobia on the raw. Ten minutes before he'd been opening doors and pulling up a chair for me with the grace of a perfect Victorian. . . There's his superior snobbish-looking air; but I've seen him in a state of pitiful humiliation; that was afterwards, down in my cabin."

"After that break-down, or whatever it was?"

"Yes."

Thornton's eyes rested on the lolling figure in the deck-chair, now lazily lighting a cigarette without removing his foot from the taffrail, then stretching before resuming his book. He was still quite oblivious of them.

"What impression does he give you, like that?"

She looked. There was a moment's hesitation.

"Well, if it wasn't for the hair, he might be a species of lounge-lizard."

Thornton smiled:

"Can you see him in deadly earnest, talking heatedly, with that composure completely gone?"

"Frankly, no. I'll have to believe you."

Thornton leaned back:

"Well, that's Michael St. Helier."

She pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"How do you reconcile it?"

He didn't answer the question itself.

"He's going to talk to me about himself sometime; at least, he implied it. That was three days ago and I'm still waiting. . . Miss St. Laurence, I've not been talking about him like this to pass the time."

"Oh? . . . Well no, of course not."

"More, for your information."

"Yes, I'm very grateful. You mean in case —— You're really warning me off him, aren't you?"

"No, only off gate-crashing and a perfectly polite — we are not interested."

It embarrassed her rather.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You're a most altruistic young lady, but he wouldn't know it."

"I'd merely be another — candidate?"

Thornton nodded.

"You're not offended?"

"No, of course not."

There was an interval.

"I'm wondering whether you're not rather the sort of person — We'd have to observe all the proprieties. . . Miss St. Laurence, I'm going to introduce you to him with full Victorian formalities."

She was looking startled.

"I shall approach him for permission, stating the grounds on which the introduction is desired. By the way, have you any particular hobby, interest in life —"

"My dear Father, this sounds dreadful. . . Interest? I'm a most ordinary person. Hobby? Interest?"

He remembered something.

"Haven't the St. Laurences rather a famous estate? I've a dim recollection of being driven past it once. In Surrey?"

"It's in Surrey, yes. The Beech Avenue is what you're thinking of."

"Am I? You live there, I imagine."

"I do."

"What's the name of the place?"

"Hollingham."

"Hollingham. We could work it in. . . Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence — the St. Laurences of Hollingham, you know — you've heard of the Beech Avenue — that sort of thing?"

"He may not have the slightest interest in Beech Avenues."

"Still, we could hang the introduction on to that. And it would give him matter for preliminary remarks."

"If any," she said. "Very well." She looked up and caught him smiling to himself.

"What is it?"

"I was only — No, it would be rude."

"Please tell me."

"It only struck me as rather funny, introducing a couple of Archangels."

A ripple of laughter came, to his relief.

"I know — Michael St. Helier, Gabrielle St. Laurence. . . Oh, dear! Will he see it?"

"I hope so. Do him good. Anyway . . . I approach him for permission ——"

"Do I wait here while that's going on?"

"No, I'd say — hover in the background, demurely. I'll ——"

He broke off at a sound behind them and screwed round to look. Miss St. Laurence had heard it too and did the same. The sound had been unmistakable — a cabin window being shut above their heads. Thornton noticed the number beneath it, turned back slowly and glanced to his right.

The deck-chair was empty. . .

There was no sign of St. Helier on deck.

Their eyes met. There was consternation in her own:

"He must have —— Did you know that was his cabin?"

"I didn't. But I've just seen the number."

She informed him:

"Neither did I; but I've just seen his hair, inside."

Thornton considered.

"I'm afraid we must assume that where the hair of Michael is there is Michael too. I wonder why he closed the window, on a lovely sunny morning. . . The situation is pregnant with possibilities. How long has he been in there? Not more than three or four minutes. Could he hear? If so, did he? And how much? And was that the reason why?"

"Father, do be serious. This is ghastly!"

"We mustn't panic. We weren't saying anything very ghastly. He'll appreciate that you have no ulterior motives."

"But you simply *can't* introduce me now?"

"I admit it may not be the most favourable moment."

"Couldn't you —— You'll have to find out somehow if he heard anything."

Thornton pondered. She watched his face anxiously.  
"That might be managed. I'll try."

He regarded her cheerfully:  
"I rather hope he did hear."  
"Hope he *did*?"  
"Yes. Do him good." He smiled and looked at his watch.  
"There's just time for the swimming pool before lunch. . . By  
the way, I've not the remotest notion where you're bound  
for — West Indies, New Zealand, Australia?"

She managed to recover herself.

"New Zealand."

"Oh? There's plenty of time then."

Assuming St. Helier was going that far?

"You're going there, too?"

"I am."

"What, not for the Congress?"

"I believe so."

"Padre, you're not —— Are you taking part in it?"

"That's the idea."

"This is most exciting!"

"Yes, we must talk about it."

Thornton stood up.

"But, Father, what about ——"

"Leave it to me."

He went off.

## CHAPTER V

**A**NYTHING to rouse that young man! He had meant it when he hoped that St. Helier had overheard them. It would require an apology and an explanation, and might give an opening that would lead to that "talk about myself."

Why St. Helier's confidence was still being withheld, heaven alone knew. Three days ago, in that humiliated mood, he had intended to unburden his soul, as on the unhappy occasion in the garden-room; of that Thornton was morally certain. Nothing whatever had happened, however. They had said "Good morning" and "Good evening" passing each other about the boat. Once—yesterday after tea—Thornton had seen a chance and sauntered up to the solitary figure standing astern of B deck watching some of the crew at work on the swimming pool below.

The attempt had been futile from the start. They had exchanged a few stilted remarks about the opening of the swimming pool next morning, on running into midsummer with the English winter only a week away, and other banalities. St. Helier's very politeness had warned him off—the politeness of a man on his guard. The attempt had fizzled out in trite observations on nothing in particular and finally, "Well, cheerio." "Cheerio, Padre."

He had drawn blank.

It had been as impossible to invite any confidences as to broach what had been "handed" to him by Robert Curtin at the family gathering, though he fully intended to do so. For that warning of trouble ahead was not so imaginary as it first sounded. Thornton had received intimations from other quarters including a hint from the Captain himself.

But he simply couldn't introduce intimate matters confronted by that wall of reserve.

He had sensed a possibility in Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence this morning. She was of the same breed as St. Helier himself. Her interest in him was not in a male, but in a pathetically solitary young man against whom insinuations were being launched. The highly eligible Michael St. Helier would be safe enough; it had barely occurred to her that he was attractive.

Thornton thanked heaven, though, that he had checked her impulse, however sincerely humane; St. Helier, approached like that, would in all probability have frozen up. An introduction by himself stood more chance, although that cabin-window business had for the moment deferred it.

If Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence, with that quality of sympathy which is selfless, couldn't draw him out, nobody could.

That introduction had to come off.

He was fully aware that he was doing it uninvited when, after dinner that evening, he tapped on St. Helier's cabin-door. But this time he was making sure. There was not going to be another of those sterile attempts on deck with the disadvantage of others about. . .

"Yes? Who is it?"

The voice from the other side of the door was not encouraging. He opened it however and went in. St. Helier was in an easy chair, reading, with his dinner-jacket unbuttoned. He regarded him in a surprised way:

"Oh?"

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence before his manners came to the rescue. He stood up:

"Take the chair, won't you?"

It came in a tone which told Thornton that the invitation was purely formal and that he had done the wrong thing in walking in on him. He didn't take the chair but laid his hand firmly on St. Helier's shoulder and sat him down again. The action robbed the other momentarily of his self-possession. Thornton planted himself on the cushioned seat under the

deck-window and began filling his pipe leisurely. He had expected something of this kind.

"How much did you hear this morning?" He pointed with the stem of his pipe at the window. St. Helier was considering how to act apparently and didn't answer. . .

"I beg your pardon," came suddenly.

"I asked how much you heard this morning."

"Oh, that!"

There was a note of relief almost. He relaxed in the chair, suggesting by his manner that, if this was all, Thornton was welcome.

"I'm afraid I heard a good deal; I couldn't very well help it. Er—the window wasn't meant to shut with a bang like that; I was trying to do it quietly."

Thornton almost gasped.

"I didn't want to embarrass you," St. Helier explained.

This was anything but what he had expected.

"Well—it's very decent of you to take it like this."

"Not in the least. It was rather interesting. I liked the Archangel part." Michael St. Helier was actually grinning. "By the way, Miss St. Laurence—that's her name, isn't it? She's wrong in thinking Beech Avenues mightn't interest me. Look here." He indicated with a sweep of his hand the books which lay on the table at his side and behind him on the cabin bureau.

Thornton, to give himself time, stood up and began examining. By their titles they were mostly books on gardens and trees. St. Helier held up the one he had been reading. Thornton read, "The Trees of England."

"I was just looking up the Hollingham Beech Avenue when you came in." He turned over the pages and handed it to him. Thornton found himself staring at a remarkably fine photograph—"The Beech Avenue, Hollingham."

"Give it me. I'll show you ours."

Thornton did so, feeling slightly dazed. There was more shuffling of pages.

"The Hollingham one's longer, I believe. . . That's ours." Thornton found himself looking at — "The Beech Avenue, Chesters, Yorks." He studied it murmuring that it was very fine.

"That's Viscount St. Helier's place?"

"That's our place, yes."

There was an emphasis on the "our."

Thornton sat down again:

"You're keen on trees and things?"

St. Helier nodded, an eager light in his eyes. It was the light Thornton had seen in them on that occasion in the garden-room when the other had said he was going to confide in him, and which that remark of his about war had immediately quenched.

"Have a look at these." St. Helier was rummaging about on the bureau. He picked up a large volume and handed it. Thornton opened it and turned over the pages, glancing at the headings — "Rock Plants," "Flowering Shrubs," "Herbaceous Borders." It was magnificently illustrated in colour. He stopped at one particularly gorgeous flowering-shrub of rose-pink. "Magnolia Campbellii," St. Helier informed him. "They take fifteen years to flower. We've got one at Chesters."

"Topping," Thornton said. He continued to turn over. "I like that." "Prunus Communis," came quickly. "Yes, I know — not so pretentious." "Almond, isn't it?" "That's it." St. Helier was leaning forward, the aloofness vanished: "Almond! Cherry! Apple! Padre, my own garden's packed with them. They're all 'Common,' but there's nothing to touch them for blossom."

Thornton agreed. St. Helier rummaged about again and found another volume, similarly illustrated. Thornton followed him picking out various species, explaining their characteristics. His voice took on a hushed note for some reason. He closed the volume after a while, and Thornton asked him:

"You've your own garden at Chesters?"

"Rather! My grandfather saw to that."

"Your grandfather?"

"He laid out the Chesters gardens — at least as they are now. They'd been neglected. I think he used to watch me pottering about whilst it was all being done. He knew I was keen."

"How old were you then?"

"Oh, about seventeen I suppose. . . It was rather curious the way it happened. You know those wooden labels you stick in when you're planting — to mark what you're putting in?"

Thornton nodded.

"The gardeners who were doing the job used to let me write the names on them. They gave me a gardening book with everything marked. My grandfather found me at it, and asked me why I was doing it; I told him I'd want to know what they all were when they came up in the Spring. He didn't say any more; but I went out next day, and there was a whole acre wired off and marked, 'Private property of Michael St. Helier.'

"I like that!" Thornton said. A question occurred to him: "Is he alive now?"

"He died before the gardens were finished. Before the spring."

"Oh, I'm sorry. That was rather sad."

There was a pause. Michael St. Helier began fingering one of the books. Thornton watched him, wondering. This interview, as he'd thought of it, was not an interview at all. There was no reserve to break through with St. Helier like this. Things were not taking the direction he had anticipated; that didn't matter though. Thank God, they were talking naturally at last. He asked cautiously:

"You lived at Chesters in your grandfather's time, then?"

"We've always lived at Chesters," was the reply. St. Helier cleared his throat: "Padre, I've not referred to my father and mother — my stepmother she is."

Thornton waited.

"We don't get on. If it wasn't for the gardens, I don't

think I could live at Chesters. You see, we've absolutely nothing in common."

"Oh? I'm sorry."

"I'd rather like to tell you about it. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Tell me anything you like."

There was a troubled look in those brown expressive eyes.

"You've probably heard of my father? Most people have."

"I've heard of him, yes."

Thornton didn't say what, though.

"It wasn't so bad whilst I was at school — Harrow, that was — and my grandfather was still alive. My father married again a couple of years ago; she's an American heiress. I was eighteen then, and I left Harrow just afterwards."

"Your grandfather died before that?"

"Yes, some months before. . . I didn't come back from school for the wedding, which was rather a terrific affair, and it was that first set my stepmother against me. I didn't want to; my mother was rather a wonderful person, and I couldn't bear the idea of anyone taking her place. I liked it even less when I got back from Harrow and found what my stepmother was like. This isn't boring you?"

"Not at all."

"I wasn't back at Chesters an hour before she was hinting that my not turning up for the wedding was an insult. My father took her side; he was infatuated with her, and still is. She's fifteen years younger than he and a sensuous-looking beauty. That was my first meeting with her and it set up — well, a mutual antagonism between us. I told her it was nothing personal, since I'd never seen her, but I disliked smart weddings. She answered sarcastically that Harrow hadn't done much for my education. . . Still, all that wouldn't have mattered so much. It was my father more. There'd never been much affection between us. There was none now. I think he'd expected me to fall down and adore her. Well, I couldn't. You can't adore a person whose only ambition is social prestige, and once she's Lady St. Helier calls her husband 'that old fool' behind his back. It didn't take more than a

few days to find that out. Padre, I don't want to be uncharitable, but I don't think even you could stick my stepmother."

Thornton raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"Go on."

"Well, it'll give you a notion of what things are like at Chesters when I tell you that — oh, did I tell you I was going out to Australia? I forgot."

Thornton saw his chance.

"You didn't. You've told me nothing about yourself. In fact you've been so reticent that I'm only just grasping that you're talking about Michael St. Helier now."

The other coloured. He didn't take offence, however.

"I'm sorry, Padre; I've not been able to somehow," came quickly. "You'll understand a bit when you know what these last two years have been; I had to get away from it all. It's why I'm going to Australia. . . They've turned Chesters between them into a menagerie — hunting-snobs, county people, the peerage; my father'll hardly look at a person without a title. It's twenty or thirty people every week-end now — except the season, they're in town for that of course. Any nit-wit will do, if he's one of the people 'one knows.' Chesters has the reputation of being the biggest noise in week-ends in England. My father boasts that his week-end entertaining costs him five hundred pounds a time and two hundred pounds of it in drinks. He does it for her partly, and, ye gods, she's in her element! It's like a mad-house on Saturdays and Sundays. . . I say, I'm sorry, but this can't be interesting you?"

"It's interesting me immensely."

"I'm only telling you because it'll help you to understand. I hate it. My God, how I hate it all! And they know I do. We've had row after row, because I damn well won't take what my father calls my 'place as son of the house.' I can't. It's the kind of life I loathe — drinks, high-pitched drivel all about nothing, and what they call top-hat stuff, horseplay and all that; middle-aged men and women gamboling about. Saturday night's 'Horseplay night.' They get tight, some of them.

There was a devil of a row over a horseplay night. Two of them came up to my room to fetch me down; wanted me to join in the 'fox-hunt'—a fox-hunt's a pretty dirty thing, a girl's the fox of course. My stepmother had put them up to it, they tried to get me down by force in the end when they saw I wasn't coming; they'd already been calling me a cissy... I can use my fists, Padre."

"You look as if you could."

"Well, I did. They were both of them tight, red-faced hunting chaps. I was in a devil of a rage because I knew it was my stepmother. I got the door open and then let out. It was darned funny in a way because the fox-hunt was just going past my room, on all fours, and I sent them down on the top of it and then kicked them in the pants—though I believe I got a wrong man. Somebody else had his finger put out... They didn't try a second time; I locked my door and stayed there... My father was blazing mad about it next morning, and my stepmother wasn't on speaking terms; I'd behaved like a lout and wasn't fit for decent society. We had it out on the Monday formally, and I told them both that on no conditions was I going to have anything to do with their decent society, and that I'd have meals up in my own room over week-ends in the future. They could see to that or ask me to leave Chesters altogether, which I'd gladly do."

"What happened?"

"Week-end meals upstairs, ever since. They'd have been delighted to turn me out, if I hadn't been the only son of Viscount St. Helier."

"What had that to do with it?"

"Everything. Their only use for me is to see me marry into the peerage and enhance the St. Helier prestige. I told you what they were like."

"Oh? So they keep you there to ——"

Thornton broke off, smiling to himself.

"I know it's amusing, but it's true. My stepmother attends to that part. I know the technique of it by heart now. They arrive when the week-end's over. My stepmother informs

me fully of whom they are — it's always Lord somebody or other's perfectly charming daughter. She's all honey when they're there: 'Michael has such a lovely garden — too perfect. Michael dear, show her your garden.' It's contrived so that we're alone together whenever possible. Inexpressibly vulgar. It's so transparent they see through it themselves sometimes. One of them with a sense of humour gave me an imitation of Lady St. Helier replenishing her with my charms; she's the only one I really get on with, because she's no more interested than I am. Most of them are, unfortunately — too darned interested, and make themselves cheap. I've been getting rude lately, according to my stepmother, to her 'guests.' There was another row over that. I told her straight out that I'd no intention of marrying any of them. My father of course took it as an 'insult to my wife.' Can you see it all, Padre? What it's like there?"

Thornton said slowly:

"Yes . . . I can understand quite a lot now."

St. Helier regarded him.

"Now?"

"Yes. You have rather a strange manner, haven't you?"

"Have I? In what way?"

Thornton was taking his opportunity; he could put it to him casually and naturally now:

"I can understand why you go about in that aloof way and avoid people. It's really what you've been driven into at home, isn't it?"

St. Helier looked puzzled.

"Aloof? I don't know that I exactly avoid people. You mean on board? There's no particular reason for talking to them?"

"Well, there's no obligation. It's more sociable, of course."

St. Helier considered.

"I hadn't thought much about it. I suppose I am rather unsociable. Yes, you may be right. It's become a habit I think. I scarcely talk at meals nowdays with my father and stepmother; I can't discuss society doings and scandals and the

money-market—that's their conversation from morning till night. I talk with the gardeners, they're worth talking to. I'm gardening most of the day and I read at night. . . I look aloof? I've no intention of looking anything. I do deliberately avoid anything in the shape of a skirt. Damn it all, anybody would—after all that business of my stepmother's."

"I can imagine it putting you off. Still, it wouldn't do any harm just to mix occasionally?"

"What, here? On board?"

"There're some quite nice people on the boat."

"But why should I?"

Thornton felt stumped. St. Helier was not giving him quite the lead he wanted. He remembered the family-party commission and plunged, however:

"There's a certain amount of unpleasantness on board, about it."

St. Helier stared unapprehendingly.

"About your keeping so entirely to yourself."

"But —— Well, it doesn't harm anybody."

The monk studied him for a moment. Of course it didn't harm anybody, and it wouldn't have mattered much if ——

"You won't think me offensive if I make myself plain?"

"No, of course not."

"Very well. Can you see it like this? You're the kind of young man who simply can't help attracting attention to himself—I can say this to you because you don't seem to suffer from conceit. You're much too good-looking, and if I were a novelist I should describe you as possessing an element of mystery and romance; you're also the son of the notorious Viscount St. Helier. Your name on the passenger-list caused a mild flutter, I gather. You sit conspicuously in solitary glory at a table by yourself. You talk to nobody. All that by itself is enough to start chatter, especially in view of your father's reputation. Do you see?"

"Yes, I think so. You're conveying as politely as possible that I'm considered a snob? Padre, I don't think I could be one if I tried."

"No, I don't think you could. I said so to somebody myself. Although, in manner, you're the best imitation of a snob I've seen. Not now, as you're talking to me; but when you're going about by yourself. That's how it strikes others. You don't mind?"

"No. Go on."

Thornton hesitated. He disliked going on intensely. He would far sooner leave it dead and buried—that incident last Monday night. There had been no allusion to it since. He found it difficult to believe that it had happened, with St. Helier talking freely and intimately to him like this, and not the remotest trace of it about him. Still, it was difficult to believe that this was the young man who had behaved as he had in the garden-room. . .

"All right. It probably wouldn't have mattered much, your manner and all that, if that thing hadn't happened on deck. You couldn't help it, I know, but it created rather a disastrous impression. They're mostly British and Colonials on board, and it's one of the things that's not done. I'm taking you at your word and telling you."

"I'd much sooner know. What is it they're saying?"

"You're being called a coward, to put it bluntly."

"A coward? Oh? . . . Oh, very well. Yes?"

His tone was so indifferent as to make Thornton pause. There was not the slightest suggestion of shame. And he had been so humiliated, at the time.

"You don't mind it, then?"

"I don't mind what they're saying. I'm so used to things being said about me."

At home? It gave the monk an insight. St. Helier was so hardened to it that it didn't bother him—merely strangers calling him a coward.

"Don't answer me if you don't want to, but what were you so terribly upset about—afterwards?"

The colour came, flooding into his face and his lips started quivering. He fumbled about for a cigarette and lit it with shaking fingers; then sat pulling at it quickly with his eyes on

the ground. This was the last thing Thornton had wanted:

"I'm dreadfully sorry. Forget that I asked it."

St. Helier looked up. There was pain in his eyes, but he had control of himself again.

"Th—— that's all right, Padre. You couldn't know."

He couldn't. He was mystified.

"It's to do with what I was going to talk to you about, that's all." He cleared his throat. "I *am* going to talk to you about it. It's only that I've not felt like it. I can now, after all this—it'll be easier. Will you come in to-morrow some time?"

"Yes, of course I will. Right."

Thank heaven it had come at last! Thornton hadn't quite said all he'd intended; the rest however could wait. He stood up, preparing to go.

"Wait a minute, Padre. . . Here, take a cigarette."

Thornton took one. St. Helier lit it for him.

"No, sit down again."

Thornton obeyed. The other had recovered his composure. "There's some unpleasantness? What sort of unpleasantness? Just talk?"

"Rather more than that."

"What, trouble of some kind?"

"Yes, there is. You give them the impression of adopting a superior attitude, over that business on deck — you don't care a damn what they think. They don't forget that you're the son of Viscount St. Helier, who talks about the 'lower orders.'"

St. Helier was looking frankly amazed.

"But the thing's absurd. I didn't even know anybody was bothering. Superior? I'm not adopting any attitude. And I loathe that expression of my father's."

"Of course. But that's how they look at it."

"They? Who are 'they'?"

Thornton smiled:

"Well, you've just been telling me about your horseplay friends."

St. Helier looked puzzled for a moment. Then:

"Oh, I see. Who are the horseplay crowd here?"

Thornton informed him:

"You'll find them hanging round the bar, I believe."

St. Helier considered.

"And they're going to make trouble?"

"They're hinting at it."

"Hinting what?"

"I can't say, but you're not going to be allowed to get away with it. It may blow over of course."

St. Helier considered again.

"It's so darned silly. I'd barely thought of how they'd regard it."

"They simply assume it of course; because you give every appearance of regarding your fellow-passengers as beneath contempt."

"But, how appalling! . . . I'd better ——" He ran his fingers through his hair. "Well, is there anything I can do, Padre?"

Thornton seized his chance:

"Yes, talk with people."

"Oh? . . . Oh, all right." There was a pause. "Yes, I suppose I'd better."

"You sound reluctant."

"I was only wondering how to make a start?"

Thornton appeared to deliberate. He remarked casually:

"There's Miss St. Laurence of course."

St. Helier looked doubtful.

"She's not in the least interested," he was assured.

He smiled, as though relieved.

"I say, what were you two really up to this morning? I only caught bits here and there, you know."

Thornton began laughing:

"Never mind. How would you like it if I introduced you?"

"All right. Thanks very much. She looks quite a decent sort."

"She is. She's a Catholic by the way."

"Well, I've no objection to Catholics."

"Thanks," the monk said drily.

"I'm so sorry. I forgot."

It would be safer to nail him down. The sooner St. Helier was seen talking to somebody the better, especially if that somebody were the highly approved and popular Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence.

"What about to-morrow morning? We could have that talk of ours in the evening after dinner?"

"Very good. Certainly."

"Elevenish? Outside here?"

"Right, Padre."

St. Helier smiled broadly as though something had just struck him:

"I've got it now, what you two were up to — 'Frightfully funny introducing a couple of Archangels. . . No, I'd say hover in the background demurely' — that bit."

Thornton buried his head in his hands.

## CHAPTER VI

HE WAS still feeling bewildered.

It had all happened in the space of an hour.

Beginning with the cold reception of his entry and ending with St. Helier and himself on such intimate terms that the former could actually pull his leg over that plotting outside the cabin-window.

The monk laughed to himself.

The plotting had been an absurd waste of time! Michael St. Helier had revealed himself for a completely human being who needed no manoeuvring. The wall of reserve had all in a moment collapsed, in fact directly he found that he was not being rushed into that "talk about myself." He had even arranged for that talk of his own accord. And this time it was definitely coming off.

The monk found a seat and took possession of it. He had come out here on deck after leaving the other's cabin. The night was warm and brilliant with stars overhead.

He saw his mistake now. Michael St. Helier couldn't be driven. You had to wait until he "felt like it." He had learned a good deal in an hour.

That spontaneous picture of his life at Chesters had been illuminating. It accounted for a lot; his habits of mind and manner; the solitariness. He had been driven into a life of his own. . . Thornton could see it now. He had begun to see it whilst the other was telling him. St. Helier had merely brought that solitary life of his own on board with him. It made his behaviour, in one respect, explicable.

There was no sign of embitterment, from his way of relating it; more of a craving for sympathy. Even of his stepmother he had spoken with cynical humour rather than uncharitableness, and merely giving the facts. The voyage to Australia was an escape from an intolerable situation. What he was

going to do there had not been vouchsafed, any more than whether he would eventually return to Chesters. His garden there seemed to be the one link that held him to the place.

Thornton recalled that eager light in his eyes when he spoke of it; he had been almost excited showing him those books. A young man of twenty who took a small library of books on trees and flowers with him to Australia must have a remarkable love of nature. He hadn't been driven into that; he had been like it as a boy.

And he was the young man whose whole being reacted quite irrationally to horrors? He was rational enough in other respects — a surprisingly human being.

Thornton wondered.

That abnormal revulsion had somehow to do with whatever it was he was going to tell him about himself, so he had gathered. It was surmisable that his behaviour in the garden-room had somehow to do with it as well; so also that momentary reaction just now, although he had only asked him a reasonable question. It had nothing to do with what others might think of him; he appeared sublimely indifferent to opinions about himself.

Still, he was quite willing to do what he could to avert trouble, and behave more sociably — Gabrielle St. Laurence looked a "decent sort"; he was perfectly agreeable to meeting her. He had been most accommodating.

It had all happened surprisingly easily. His own cautious planning for the interview, carrying out the family commission, formally introducing Miss St. Laurence, had been altogether superfluous. St. Helier seemed agreeable to anything.

Except —

Except when it came to intruding.

Upon that locked compartment of his soul.

It was very decidedly a locked compartment. He had told him, more or less seriously, that there was an element of mystery about him. There was . . .

Something that had to be hidden.

It was perceptible, though indefinable, in those hauntingly

attractive brown eyes which must have wreaked havoc with his stepmother's protégées. It was there behind that almost reverential way in which he spoke of trees and flowers. It was somewhere there beneath the sudden disrupting of his self-possession when that revulsion gained the upper hand—to the loss of every shred of self-control on the occasion of that tragic night.

Something in conflict beneath that normally calm composure?

Trees and flowers and a garden he loved?

And horrors?

The one invested with a kind of sacredness.

The other with loathing. . .

Whether to-morrow's "talk" would ——

Thornton stopped short in his speculations. Something had caught his eye. He stood up, suddenly alert, and watched.

There was nothing in a couple of men standing about on deck, but they were standing by the seat where he and Miss St. Laurence had sat this morning and therefore by the window of St. Helier's deck-cabin. There was nothing in that either. It was the way in which they were behaving.

He recollects that St. Helier's window had been open while he was in there, and the curtain not drawn. He couldn't see the window itself from where he was, but he could see what the two men were doing—peering in cautiously, scrutinising. From the patch of yellow showing on the deck, St. Helier had switched on his light and presumably was in full view.

They drew away, walked off and disappeared down a companion-way.

Thornton strolled slowly along and glanced in as he passed. Michael St. Helier was sitting there large as life, reading, with his back to the window.

There was nothing in that to arouse curiosity. It had not been merely curiosity. They had been studying the occupant of the cabin carefully and deliberately.

He halted at the companion-way; trying to place those two men. He had seen their figures more than their faces. . .

He descended the companion-way, went along B deck until he came to an outer entrance to the Lounge, and then stood there undecidedly. There would be no harm in identifying them if he could.

He went inside. The place was packed with people playing cards or chattering in groups. He nodded at one or two nearby, looking about him casually. There was no sign of the two men he had seen on deck. Somebody took him by the arm and he turned. It was the Captain, to his surprise, and he realised that he must have followed him into the Lounge.

"Can you spare me a few minutes, Padre?"

Thornton said he could spare a nice person like the Captain as long as he liked. The Captain smiled, "Come alone." Thornton hesitated. "Would a quarter of an hour from now do?" It was all the same to the Captain: "You know my cabin?" He did, and the Captain went off.

Thornton picked his way through the card-tables to the swing-door which opened on to the bar, intending to walk through to the smoking-room beyond, with his eyes open. A strong atmosphere of drinks greeted him. It was a busy night by the crowd, and he found it worse than getting through the Lounge.

"Have a drink, Padre?"

It was a man he knew slightly. Thornton accepted, for the sake of the opportunity it would give him. Whilst the drinks were being ordered he looked round carelessly. . .

Yes, they were in a corner with some others at a table. He recognised them at once—one a tall hefty-looking man with a bull-neck, the other shorter with slouching shoulders, both youngish. They had obviously only recently arrived, for a steward was taking their orders.

"Wal, I'm surprised to see you in the bar, Padre."

The loud voice of Robert Curtin brought heads turning in his direction. Thornton felt slightly embarrassed. He retorted, however, equally loudly that he would have been surprised if he had *not* seen Robert Curtin in the bar. There was a laugh and a man called, "One up to you, Padre."

Thornton drank "Here's how" to the man who was standing him, keeping an eye on the group in the corner whilst they exchanged remarks. The man with the bull-neck was talking in a low voice whilst the others listened. After a while he leaned back and listened in his turn to what appeared to be a general discussion of something. They kept their voices down as though anxious not to be overheard. There were occasional grins.

Thornton finished his drink, said "Cheerio, and thanks" and made his way out. Half way across the Lounge Robert Curtin caught him up with, "Padre, I reckon I've somethin' for you to chew, if you'll come along to the Bureau." Thornton explained that he was due at the Captain's cabin. The Bureau was on the way however and Robert Curtin prevailed. Along the corridor from the Lounge he was informed, "Saw you giving that crowd the once-over. Wal, that's the lot I was talkin' about and they're up to somethin' to-morrow night." In the Bureau off B floor-landing Thornton found himself confronted by the baize panel which displayed the ship's Notices. Robert Curtin pointed to one headed — "Masquerade Dinner and Dance, Saturday. Names and Impersonations of Competitors." Beneath the heading were scribbled various names, each with a fanciful title appended. Robert Curtin's finger travelled down the list and rested on: "Charles Withers and Co. — 'The Lower Orders.'"

"Does that give you a notion, Padre? Saturday's to-morrow." Thornton said, "Um"; he believed that "Lower Orders" was a phrase associated with a personage called Viscount St. Helier. "I should imagine they're going to masquerade as tramps or something." Robert Curtin informed him bluntly, "There's more to it than that," and asked him if he knew who Charles Withers was. Thornton didn't. Charles Withers, it seemed, was a film actor with a not too savoury reputation, who played humourous parts of the low comedian type. Robert Curtin went to a table on which various magazines were laid, took up one called "Filmland," turned over the pages and presented it. Thornton found himself staring at a

heavily handsome man whose general appearance seemed somehow familiar. Next moment he realised that he had just been seeing him in the life—the bull-necked man in the bar.

"He was down there just now?"

Robert Curtin nodded.

"Anyhow, what's the trouble?"

"I was tellin' you the horseplay crowd on a boat got a habit of doin' their stuff on boobs, and they're doin' it to-morrow night—you saw 'em at that table. They've bin fixin' it up too loudly and it's got out, some of it. I told you they'd got a ready-made boob on this boat—your young Archangel. Wal, they've got him taped up for to-morrow night, and Charles Withers is doin' the takin' off. D'you get me?"

Thornton considered the statement.

"More or less. Charles Withers is going to burlesque St. Helier?"

"You got it, Padre. I'm tellin' you because it might be jest as well to put that young man wise."

"I see. . . Two of them were inspecting him through his cabin-window just now. One was Charles Withers; the other was the little man with the slouch next him at the table."

"That's interestin'. I guess they'd call that corroborative evidence in court, because they're in one of the big Companies together, and Taylor's his make-up man—the little man you're speakin' of with the slope."

"Oh? You're quite sure of all this?"

"I am. You can pick up a lot if you keep your ears open in the bar."

Thornton regarded him for a moment.

"Very well. You'd better know this. Listen."

He gave him something of what had transpired between St. Helier and himself earlier in the evening. Robert Curtin's eyebrows lifted when he was assured that St. Helier was innocent of the snobbishness his manners suggested. The fact of his willingness to do what he could by way of sociability to avert trouble impressed him more. He was informed that the process of installation into favour would begin with a free

of charge public viewing of Michael St. Helier in conversation with Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence at eleven a.m. next morning.

"Gee, Padre — that's good work."

Robert Curtin stroked his chin.

"All the same I guess it won't stop 'em doin' their stuff tomorrow night."

It probably wouldn't. Thornton asked:

"It's done isn't it, this kind of thing?"

"Takin' off somebody? Yes, I guess it's done all right, on masquerade nights. No harm in it, if it's jest foolery."

Robert Curtin rubbed his chin again.

"But I don't quite like that title, and I don't quite like Mr. Charles Withers."

"What, he might — overdo it?"

"Wal, they're makin' a boob of a young man who's got himself unpopular, and Charles Withers ent the sort of man by the look of him to consider nice feelin' — — — What are you grinnin' about, Padre?"

"Sorry," said Thornton. "I was only — — — Something occurred to me, that's all."

Robert Curtin waited.

"St. Helier's no fool, you know," he was told. "That exhibition he made of himself is nothing to go by."

"Meanin' he won't take it lyin' down?"

Thornton, instead of answering the question, regarded him meditatively, and then glanced at his watch.

"Very well. I'll put him wise. Thanks for letting me know."

He walked off to the Captain's cabin.

Robert Curtin was left guessing as to what had "occurred" to the other and just what that grin portended.

Thornton entered in response to the Captain's "Come in," to find the latter sitting at his desk and his steward preparing his bunk for the night. Captain Gibson brushed together some papers before him and indicated an easy chair. Thornton before sitting down examined the arresting collection of pho-

tographs which the cabin contained, most of them autographed. There were celebrities amongst them. Some were scrawled with, "Many thanks for a happy voyage," and like felicities.

"Find them interesting?"

"Very," said Thornton. "The Captain of this boat's a popular person."

The steward departed, closing the door behind him. Captain Gibson's smile left his face and there was a sudden sadness in the eyes that met Thornton's.

"The Captain of this boat's not to be envied this voyage." He added, "Loss of life is one of the things that goes in and stays there, Padre."

That tragic night? Thornton, in his absorption over St. Helier's part in it, had rather forgotten the Captain who had come to him in the early hours of that morning and unburdened himself of his pain. He had seen him going about his duties, matter of fact and business-like as usual, outwardly showing no sign. They had come out of the hurricane into glorious weather further south, with everybody cheerful again, the dining-room a babel of chatter and laughter—to-morrow evening a masquerade. And the man who had made the decision to risk it, and, by an unforeseen occurrence, lost the lives of his crew, had to carry on with the iron of it searing his soul. . .

"Why are these things allowed, Padre? I'm no saint, but I put up an SOS to the Almighty to bring those men back."

Thornton didn't answer immediately, and when he did, it was to remark meditatively something about, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

The Captain regarded him in a Britishly uncomfortable way. Thornton suggested: "There was a splendour about it? You'd sooner die in your finest hour, yourself?"

The other muttered to the effect that he supposed he would.

"But, why the devil should it have happened at all?"

Thornton refused to allow that it had just "happened," won-

dering whether it was for this that he had been requested for a few minutes. He asked him whether he had ever read "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." The Captain hadn't and therefore failed to see the relevance of the question. He had heard of the book however.

Thornton gave him a rough idea of it — the five who went to their death with the breaking of the bridge, Brother Juniper contemplating the problem of why those particular five, and then the glimpse given of their lives indicating the reason for it in each case.

The Captain sat there wrinkling his forehead.

"I'm to believe that of my men?"

"That there was a reason in every case. Yes."

Thornton asked him if he believed in Providence. The Captain did. He hesitated, however, when the monk put it more definitely:

"In a Personal Being intimately concerned with the lives and deaths of every single man in that boat?"

"I'd not thought of it exactly —"

The monk clinched the matter:

"No. All the same He created and loved and died for every man of them, and knew the one moment for every one of them to die."

The Captain was looking somewhat overwhelmed.

"Well . . ."

"Well, that's Providence. What is it you wanted to see me about, Captain?"

The other remained digesting the unequivocal statement. Then he rose and went across to a chest and unlocked the top drawer.

"You're very definite, Padre," he said with his back to him.

"Your question was very definite."

"You think those men — they were damn fine men — they're all right, wherever they are?"

"They volunteered for the job, didn't they?"

"Every one of them."

"Very well. There's something about, 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.' Does that make you happier?"

He heard the drawer close.

"Thanks, Padre."

The Captain returned with an envelope in his hand which he gave to Thornton.

"That's my second problem. Read it."

Thornton extracted a letter, unfolded it, and read:

"Dear Captain Gibson,

I am sorry to trouble you at a time when you must still be feeling things badly; we all think you are splendid in the way you have carried on in spite of that terrible happening. All sympathy.

I had meant to speak to you about this matter, but it's rather embarrassing, and I have decided to write instead.

One of your passengers, a Mr. Charles Withers, is becoming so objectionable that I have no choice left but to appeal to you for protection from his attentions. I have no male friend on board of the kind who could deal with him effectively, except perhaps the Catholic Padre, whom I don't quite like to ask.

Mr. Withers, I believe, is a film star of sorts, and seems to assume, for this reason I suppose, that women fall for him as a matter of course. He introduced himself to me on deck some days ago and I disliked the familiarity of his manner immediately and let him see it. He had the impertinence to come to my cabin the same evening, open the door without even waiting after he had tapped, and invite me for a drink! I resented it strongly, but he repeated it the following evening — to find the door locked. Last night he presented himself outside my cabin-window and proceeded to indulge in some fairly foul innuendos before I managed to get the window shut. He had been drinking, but he was sufficiently sober to know what he was saying, and he certainly intends not to be deterred. I'm afraid I must ask you to do something, so that

at least I am not subjected to this kind of thing again. Once more, forgive me for troubling.

Yrs sincerely,  
Gabrielle St. Laurence."

Thornton folded the letter and handed it back. The Captain remarked: "You know Miss St. Laurence? She's not the sort of person to romance?"

The monk, who had read the letter with increasing disgust, replied that he knew her sufficiently to dismiss the notion at once.

"I only asked because I had a case of this kind before and I found that the woman was equally to blame."

Thornton informed him that Miss St. Laurence, as far as he could judge, was indifferent to men and most certainly would not encourage a person like Withers.

"Do you know anything about Withers?"

"I was learning quite a lot about Mr. Charles Withers fifteen minutes ago, actually," the monk answered, and that Miss St. Laurence's description seemed to tally with his reputation; he could believe every word of it.

That settled it for the Captain; he would have to act. Thornton said nothing, but sat there pondering until the other asked him what it was.

"I was only thinking. Is it usual for the Captain to intervene in these cases?"

"I should say decidedly unusual. But I can see no alternative."

Thornton assured him there was quite a simple alternative, which was to leave it to himself. The other looked half relieved and half doubtful.

"That's very good of you, Padre. But, just what do you propose to do?"

Thornton smiled as he had smiled just now, leaving Robert Curtin guessing.

"Captain, you passed a hint to me about young St. Helier. That young man's not what he looks like on the surface."

The Captain was glad to hear it, but couldn't quite see what it had to do with the matter of Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence.

"In her letter," Thornton reminded him, "Miss St. Laurence explicitly states that she has no male friend of the kind to deal with an obnoxious person like Withers."

"Except yourself."

"A case like this calls for gallantry and chivalry. A middle-aged celibate \_\_\_\_\_ Captain, put yourself in her place."

"Look here, Padre, what are you proposing? I can't allow \_\_\_\_\_"

"An affair of youth, Captain!"

"We can't have brawling \_\_\_\_\_"

"Brighten up the voyage! Anyway that's settled. . ."

Thornton rose with, "Well, cheerio, Captain!" and edged towards the door. The Captain was there before him.

"You can't get away with it like that, Padre. Sit down."

Thornton did so in mock obedience. The Captain produced a bottle of whiskey, a syphon, and a couple of glasses, poured out drinks and said:

"Now, talk."

## CHAPTER VII

**T**HREE was no sinister design.

It had merely occurred to Thornton that there was a quite simple means of dealing effectively with Mr. Charles Withers. The captain listened doubtfully at first. Thornton pointed out that to take some of the conceit out of the man before tackling him on Miss St. Laurence, might render Withers more amenable when it came to a choice of either relinquishing his attentions or being subjected to measures by the Captain on whose boat she was a passenger. The Captain said "Um" a good many times, made sure that he understood, and finally acquiesced with a grin: "All right. Go ahead, Padre."

Thornton went straight to St. Helier's cabin, hoping he had not yet gone to bed. St. Helier hadn't and received him in pyjamas and dressing-gown. Thornton got down to it without any preliminary coughing:

"Now look here, young Michael, sit down and listen."

St. Helier did so, and Thornton proceeded to "put him wise." He listened composedly and without manifesting any particular surprise, and merely shrugged his shoulders over the "Lower Orders" part of the burlesque. A slight frown wrinkled his forehead when he learned that he himself was marked down for the "boob." He shrugged again however.

"Well, if it amuses them . . . Who's this person, Withers?"

Thornton told him — a film comedian.

St. Helier sat still, thinking.

"What's he like?"

Thornton described Charles Withers' appearance to the best of his ability.

"That chap? I've seen him about."

St. Helier seemed to be thinking again. He began smiling to himself.

"I say, Padre. Listen."

Thornton did so in his turn. He listened to St. Helier propounding precisely what had occurred to himself, fully assured of his own competence to carry it out. Those horseplay nights at Chesters had not been wasted on him.

"The obvious thing, isn't it?"

"The obvious thing," Thornton agreed. "I was going to suggest it."

"Were you really? . . . Right! I'm game, Padre."

"It will have to be done rather well, you know?"

"Of course. Isn't there a Fancy Dress Stores somewhere?"

There was, Thornton believed.

"A little professional help might be useful," he suggested.

And again St. Helier propounded precisely what had occurred to himself:

"You couldn't get round that — what's his name — Taylor?"

Thornton said he might, and would have a shot. Taylor, he believed, had been at his Mass one or two mornings, and if so was presumably a Catholic. He was not attractive-looking, but he might be induced. He looked at his watch, wondering if he could get hold of that little make-up man before he turned in.

"I'll let you know results first thing in the morning. By the way there'll not be much chance now of that talk to-morrow."

St. Helier agreed that it didn't look like it; still, the talk could keep for a day longer.

Thornton went off, relieved that the other had again proved himself so accommodating. At the Bureau he obtained Taylor's cabin number. Luck was with him a second time; he found it and tapped, and a voice answered, "Come in." The little make-up man was alone, playing Patience. Thornton apologised for disturbing him so late.

"That's all right, Padre. Come right in."

Taylor rose, moved away the table with the cards, and pulled up a chair into position remarking that he'd been making up his mind to call on the Padre himself. Thornton sat down. It was a hopeful beginning. At close quarters the

unattractive slouch was somehow not so noticeable. He had pleasant, humourous eyes. The monk decided to plunge without wasting time:

"Taylor, I want your professional aid. You may not be inclined to give it. You've only to say no."

The little man's eyebrows went up interrogatively.

"You're make-up man to Charles Withers?"

The little man nodded.

"To-morrow night you're making up Charles Withers for an impersonation of a young man called Michael St. Helier?"

The little man started visibly.

"Say, Padre! An' where did you get that?" came in strong Yankee.

"Never mind. The bar, if you like. Some of your friends \_\_\_\_\_" He left the sentence unfinished.

"Not my friends, Padre. That's Withers' crowd."

"Oh, I beg your pardon."

Taylor proceeded to make it clear that he was only in with Withers professionally. It was what the monk wanted to know.

"That makes it easier. . . By the way, were you successful with the back view, just now?"

Taylor hesitated, uncertain as to the allusion.

"The deck's public, you know," the monk added to give him a clue.

The other began to laugh.

"I guess you're cute at observation; you'll sure get a drink for that."

Thornton watched him mixing one.

"You're a Catholic, aren't you?"

"That's so. An' it's not the first time we've met." He asked, "Remember Father Anselm Thornton talking at the Queen's Hall, London? Four weeks back?"

"I believe I did, yes. Why, were you there?"

"Was I there? Say, Padre, you're a swell speaker, and I'm right proud to meet you on this boat."

Taylor handed him his drink, mixed another for himself

and sat down with — would it be an impertinence to ask where he was for? Thornton told him, New Zealand to start with, and gave him an outline of his tour. Taylor showed genuine pleasure when he learned that Father Anselm Thornton was booked for the States as well.

"An' we'll be seeing you at Los Angeles?"

Thornton believed he would be there.

"Then it's little Taylor himself you'll be seeing in Hollywood." Thornton found himself presented with a card bearing Taylor's Hollywood address.

"And now — what's the proposition?"

Thornton got to work.

Taylor sat back, sipping his drink slowly, watching the monk. He began tapping thoughtfully with his forefinger on the arm of his chair and muttered "Yum" once or twice as the proposition was put to him and he perceived what it would entail.

"Wal, it's a cute idea."

"Is it feasible?" Thornton asked.

"It could be done, yez. It ent the make-up that 'ud be difficult."

"What, Withers? How he'd take it?"

"I reckon Mr. Withers won't like his pitch being queered, and he'll sure spot I've had a hand in it. But it ent that either; if you're taking somebody off in a masquerade you're asking for it back. . . No, it's fair and square all right. But I'm doubting if your young man'll pull it off. Jez walking about in a make-up won't do. You gotta play the part. See?"

"Quite. Do you know the young man?"

"I know nothing about him, except that he ent popular on the boat with that I-ent-speaking-to-you manner of his, and he ent been any more popular keeping it up after doing that soft stuff the night that boat went down. I reckon, Padre, it'll jez fall flat."

Thornton considered.

"Mr. Charles Withers is not too popular on the boat, himself."

Taylor made no attempt to deny it.

"And I've what you'd call a hunch," Thornton continued, "that young St. Helier will carry it off. I know a certain amount about him; he's not quite what you'd expect, and what happened that night is no criterion."

It was Taylor's turn to consider.

"That so?" The tapping with his finger was resumed. "A gambling chance? . . . Yum."

There was a pause. Taylor emptied his glass.

"Verra well, Padre. I'll do the make-up, and I'll put him through the mannerisms. And it'll be his own funeral after that."

Taylor was true to his promise.

Excepting meals, and the half-hour spent in full view of the public with Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence, St. Helier was occupied the whole of the following morning and most of the afternoon with his Hollywood coach. When Charles Withers appeared on the games deck after tea Michael St. Helier appeared there too — reading lazily in a deck-chair, watching him and noting. . .

The introduction in the morning to Miss St. Laurence was most felicitous. At eleven a.m. punctually the two Archangels turned up on the promenade, St. Michael with the "Trees of England" under his arm and the tousled hair as usual, St. Gabrielle in white, looking exquisitely innocent, and charmed when Thornton strolled up with, "I'd rather like to introduce you to someone."

He had already given her to understand that relations between St. Helier and himself had undergone a radical change since yesterday morning and that no elaborate formalities would be required with a young man who was only too agreeable to remove the unpleasant impression he had created. She

had been delighted to hear it and vastly relieved to learn that he was human enough to appreciate the humour of the cabin-window episode. Thornton didn't mention that St. Helier had been equally relieved to know that she was not "interested."

"I'm a sort of mannequin, then—to show him off to the public?"

Thornton agreed that was the idea, more or less.

About Withers he had said little except that the Captain had shown him her letter, and that between them they would see to the matter; she could rest assured that the objectionable attentions would cease.

Thornton presented them with, "This is Miss St. Laurence" and "This is Michael St. Helier." They shook hands eyeing each other appraisingly, Miss St. Laurence rather self-conscious, St. Helier perfectly at ease: "The strategic position for the public eye would be that seat beneath my window. What do you think?" Miss St. Laurence took the cue and agreed that it would be ideal. He remarked that he had found it ideal himself yesterday morning. She coloured quickly: "I know. I'm terribly sorry; I think we'd better keep off yesterday morning. It was too appalling." "Not at all," he replied. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds." "You two," Thornton cut in, "are already the cynosure of all eyes; the entire promenade is gaping." He turned at a touch on his shoulder: "Hullo, Doc! You're just in time. . . . This is Dr. Judd . . . oh, and Mrs. Judd . . . and Robert Curtin. . . . Any more?" There were How-do-you-dos and bowings. Robert Curtin reckoned in his loud voice they'd better make a public meeting of it. Thornton reminded him in an undertone that it had been staged for Miss St. Laurence and Michael St. Helier and that the three of them were to saunter off with himself after the preliminaries. Having exchanged courtesies they did so and the Archangelic pair retired to the seat beneath the cabin-window.

When Thornton strolled past on his way to the swimming

pool a quarter of an hour later, the "Trees of England" lay closed on St. Helier's lap, they were facing each other talking eagerly, and the general public in the person of himself walked by unnoticed.

At lunch Robert Curtin drew his attention to the table occupied by Miss St. Laurence and a woman friend. Michael St. Helier was occupying it too!

"You got the idea of it into that young man, Padre."

Thornton agreed that St. Helier was showing promise. He eyed Robert Curtin.

"Heard any more about to-night? Withers?"

"No more'n I've told you."

"Well, you're going to hear some more now."

"I'm listenin'."

"This is not for the bar. See?"

"I'll not talk, Padre. But, you bin up to somethin'?"

Thornton gave him a brief account of his activities since the previous evening. It was Robert Curtin who had enlightened him as to Withers and Co., so he had better know.

The other went on eating as he listened. He made no comments until Taylor came into it. Then he put down his knife and fork:

"You ent tellin' me that little make-up man with the slope's in it?"

He was in it, Thornton told him, to the extent of helping in his professional capacity.

"And jest how?"

Thornton told him just how. Robert Curtin digested it looking extremely dubious.

"Look here, Padre, I'll admit that young St. Helier ent quite what I thought him, after meetin' him this mornin'. But he ent the type and he ent a chance agenst the kind o' slick stuff that Withers'll put across. If you don't mind my sayin' it, and if it ent too late — wal, call it off."

Thornton also put down his knife and fork.

"Look here, Curtin, you worked a family gathering on me to get that young man out of his shell. It's going all right, so far, isn't it?"

"Oh yez. And we don't want it goin' all wrong."

Thornton leaned forward:

"You think he's not the type. So does Taylor. All the same Taylor's putting him through; he wouldn't if he thought he'd merely make a fool of himself. There'll be nothing professional or slick about it; he'll do it in his own way, and I rather think it will go down all the better."

Robert Curtin stuck to it:

"You ent quite gettin' me, Padre, because I doan want to hurt your feelin's. He did that exhibition on deck in his own way, and it didn't go down at all. I'm reckonin' he's a young man with a bad streak of hysteria in him that can lose his head when things ent goin' right. And that crowd'll see to it as things ent goin' right for him if he butts in on their game. He'll be doin' better keepin' out of it."

Thornton regarded him perplexedly. Last night, unless he had completely misunderstood him, Robert Curtin had —

"I may be dull, but — you've changed your mind for some reason?"

"There ent been nothin' to change me mind, seein' as you've only jest popped this on me. If you're thinkin' I want him to take it lyin' down — wal, I don't. But I guess he's jest playin' into a professional comedian's hands, the way you want it done. He'll be findin' somebody else can do it in his own way."

Thornton asked drily:

"And what do you propose?"

"In Canada we got a way o' dealin' with skunks as insults gels like Miss St. Laurence — an', for your information, it's what Withers' been doin'."

"So I've learned," said Thornton. "Yes?"

Robert Curtin looked surprised.

"You got the dope on it? . . . Wal, and you think your young man playin' at masquerade —"

"I don't. I'm seeing to Withers myself in that matter. Anyhow, you've got a way in Canada of dealing with skunks?"

"Yez, and it's makin' em dance to a horsewhip. Mebbe there's not a horsewhip on the boat, but there's a gymnasium and there's plenty of 'em got fists — includin' your young man."

Robert Curtin had raised his voice. A head at the next table turned. Thornton intimated that he could be heard.

"And I reckon," he added more quietly, "there's nothin' else'll put the stopper on Withers."

Thornton made no reply. He was watching a man entering the dining-room and walking slowly up the centre with his eyes on Miss St. Laurence's table. It was the man they were discussing. Robert Curtin noticed him too. They saw Charles Withers half stop and coolly survey St. Helier sitting there, before making his way to his own table. It was atrociously bad manners, to say the least.

"I definitely think," said Thornton, "our Michael should do his bit to-night."

In his cabin after lunch Thornton admitted it to himself.

It was Michael St. Helier's personality on which he was relying, not his ability or inability to "play at masquerading." Robert Curtin hadn't seen that healthy spontaneous boyishness which had revealed itself yesterday evening; neither did he know anything of the St. Helier who could fend for himself in the difficult situation at Chesters, and whose easy acceptance of the "obvious thing" in reply to Charles Withers was sufficient to assure the monk. St. Helier would at least conduct himself as a gentleman, whereas it was doubtful if Charles Withers *could*. That, by itself, should tell in the younger man's favour.

The monk found himself wondering why he was so anxious that Michael St. Helier should prove himself.

For he was. Excessively anxious.

He had embarked on this voyage to New Zealand with the

prospect of a few weeks of unbroken leisure, lazing in deck-chairs under blue skies, after strenuous months in England. Almost immediately he had found himself approached by an aristocratic young man, a complete stranger, on something confidential (yet to come), been subjected to an irrational rudeness (apologised for), involved in that painful business on deck, witnessed a most embarrassing psychological breakdown, done his best to pull him together, and discovered a few days later, quite by accident, an attractively simple straightforward character beneath it all, who had opened out to him, and whose cause he was now resolutely determined to champion in face of the unpopularity this young man's behaviour had incurred.

He had been drawn to Michael St. Helier almost unaccountably.

The element of mystery about him?

There was something that compelled attention. Inordinate attention. Although attention was the last thing St. Helier wanted. There were plenty of other young men on board, but they were not continually alluded to and discussed. The very criticisms levelled upon him were inordinate, unwarrantable in the nature of the case. People seemed to take his manner as a personal insult. The incident on the night of the tragedy had been exaggerated out of all proportion; it might have been a criminal act.

Had he been ignored, it would have been understandable. Nobody ignored him. They were much too interested in him. And it wasn't merely that he was the son of a notorious Viscount. The interest was indubitably personal.

The monk was beginning to perceive what lay behind it all. The unpopularity was more of a negative sort. It was St. Helier's unknowableness that provoked.

Anyway, that matter was receiving attention.

Thank God for the altruistic Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence!

Meanwhile. . .

Meanwhile there was to-night?

## CHAPTER VIII

THAT Saturday night of the Masquerade was to remain in Thornton's memory.

In the event it fulfilled all that Robert Curtin could have desired and all that the monk had hoped would be avoided. Looking back on it later he decided that, unhappily or happily, nothing could have served better the cause of Michael St. Helier on board. By that time he had further decided that life for Michael St. Helier was not destined to run in a rut.

Thornton entered the dining-room to find the tables packed with people in fancy-dress, the whole place decorated from ceiling to floor with balloons and streamers, and the band in the gallery, augmented for the occasion, in the throes of a riotous rhythm. He made his way through a babel of voices to his table to find Robert Curtin already in his place, the matter of fact Canadian business-man in the guise of an English schoolmaster with a mortar-board on his head, a college gown over his shoulders and a cane which he was swishing at a steward passing by.

Thornton blessed himself and sat down, complimenting Robert Curtin on his get up. He took in the scene about him; the variety of guises was amazing—clowns and columbines, historic characters, proverb representations. There were nursery-rhyme heroes and heroines—Jack and Jill at the next table with their pail, Humpty Dumpty on his right, Jack the giant-killer with his giant and an enormous mask, the giant's head and neck, on the floor beside them.

His eyes travelled to Miss St. Laurence's table. It was unoccupied so far.

"Like it, Padre?"

Thornton did, immensely. He was feeling at a loss as to where all this costumery had sprung from, and was about

to ask Robert Curtin when that person leaned forward and whispered enigmatically that things were "goin' fine." There was a suspicious look of glee in Curtin's eye. He asked him in an undertone just what was going fine—"Look here, Curtin, have you been up to something?" Curtin prodded him across the table with his cane, "Wal, I guess I couldn't leave it all to the Padre," and then whacked at a balloon floating overhead which went off with a bang. He informed Thornton: "Since you're askin', I don't mind tellin' you I bin puttin' it round the boat." It appeared that Robert Curtin had been utilising the hours between lunch and dinner to acquaint pretty well every available person on board with the fact that Miss Gabrielle St. Laurence had been foully insulted by a film star whose name they could guess. "Spikin' his guns before the battle. You wait, Padre—they ent goin' to let Withers get away with it to-night."

Thornton regarded him frowningly. This Canadian seemed bent on turning the affair into a cowboy melodrama. It was obvious that he hadn't the slightest confidence in the methods of either St. Helier or himself.

Robert Curtin prodded him again:

"It ent no good frownin' at me. You English reckon to handle a swine like Withers in kid-gloves. In Canada ——"

"This isn't Canada," Thornton cut him short. "Are they lynching him or what?"

"If you want to know what's goin' to happen ——"

It began to happen at that very moment. The steward announcing the masqueraders as they entered, called above the din: "Little Bo-Peep!" and followed quickly with, "The Biter bitten!" There was a sudden hush and then an outburst of clapping as Miss St. Laurence came through the doors, exquisitely gowned and frilled with shepherdess crook complete. She was obviously immensely popular. The clapping broke off abruptly as "The Biter bitten" appeared in her trail. . .

Thornton stared. For a moment he was deceived himself, although prepared for this. The person walking behind Miss St. Laurence was, at this distance, Charles Withers to the life—

the burly build, thick neck, heavily handsome features, even the smoothly oiled black hair. It was Michael St. Helier of course.

Thornton thanked heaven for that little make-up man from Hollywood. Even Robert Curtin was impressed.

"Wal, I'm d——d!"

The make-up became visible as he came down the centre in the wake of Bo-Peep. When he was recognised for Michael St. Helier the reaction after that momentary take-in was somewhat startling. There were one or two hesitating claps and then a generous cheer. He was giving them Charles Withers' Hollywood regulation walk, and his habit of looking about him expectant of notice. He sat down with Bo-Peep at her table and spread his elbows across it drumming with his fingers, one of Charles Withers' dining-room habits. It was all done in a happy-go-lucky way.

Thornton experienced a sense of elation. St. Helier looked like succeeding with it, even allowing for the excellence of the make-up. There was no sign of nervousness and he seemed to be enjoying himself. It had taken away their breath and for the moment his unpopularity apparently was forgotten. That very daring title he had chosen? It could hardly account for this reception. He could only conclude, reluctantly, that the efforts of Robert Curtin had somehow to do with it. . . He found that person generously gripping his hand across the table:

"Wal, I won't mind admittin' ——"

Something was happening. He caught the steward's stentorian voice: "The Lower Orders."

A bedraggled procession of half a dozen tramps entered bearing aloft a banner on which "The Lower Orders" was conspicuously displayed. They halted and the band broke off, obviously by arrangement.

"The Higher Orders!"

Two opera-hatted figures came through the doors, in exaggeratedly elegant evening dress with silver-nobbed canes, and their deportment conveying infinite superiority and disdain. One of them was a very passable and recognisable replica of

Michael St. Helier, tousled hair and all. The art of the make-up was undeniable, with the features thinned down and shaped, the figure contrived with a waist. The art of Charles Withers was also undeniable as he stood there aloof and superbly indifferent to his environment, presenting them with St. Helier's way of standing about. In the silence that had fallen his counterpart in the opera-hat could be heard asking, "Who are these persons?" of the dining-room in general, and Withers replying in St. Helier's composed voice, "The Lower Orders, Horace; not people one knows."

The entry had been manifestly staged for the maximum effect, and the very elaborateness emphasised what was happening and the fiasco of it; for Charles Withers and Co. were standing there expectant of applause, and definitely the applause was not forthcoming. They must have heard from outside the reception given to Miss St. Laurence and St. Helier, and been prepared for an ovation for themselves.

There was no ovation. There was nothing.

The dining-room merely resumed its eating and drinking. Charles Withers had been deliberately and unanimously turned down.

The "Lower Orders" were looking about, uncomfortably bunched in a group, aware that something had gone wrong and embarrassed as to what to do next.

"Damn you, get on with it!" came audibly. Charles Withers was refusing to accept the situation, bewildered by it though he was. The "Lower Orders," who were evidently a mere set-off for the film star, and beyond their get-up not even funny, launched with wavering voices on a parody of a Victorian hymn, the refrain of which ran: "God bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations." As the second verse started, the dining-room spontaneously broke its silence, and conversation was resumed until it became a babel once more.

The "Lower Orders" trailed off.

Charles Withers was no longer attempting to keep up his part and only just had himself in hand; for it was impossible

to mistake the significance of what had happened. He pushed forward suddenly and made his way gloweringly with his crowd ambling behind him to the table reserved for the party.

Nobody paid the slightest attention.

"I guess that's torn it, Padre."

It certainly had—for Charles Withers and Co.

Thornton regarded Robert Curtin sitting opposite applying himself to his entree. The Canadian looked up, his eyes twinkling with triumph.

"Now, don't start frownin' at me again."

Thornton didn't know whether to frown or what. He didn't like the way it had been done, although Robert Curtin had traded on the "fouly insulted" Miss St. Laurence with amazing success. Charles Withers could hardly carry on with his masquerade in face of an open public snub. Still, a man of his calibre was unlikely to leave it at this.

"What do you want—congratulations?"

"Jest a little pat on the back, Padre. . . Whoopee!"

He whacked at another balloon and burst it, then replenished the monk's glass with red wine.

"What you want is a good long drink."

Thornton between mouthfuls was watching Withers. He saw him lean forward from his chair peering at the table where Miss St. Laurence was talking animatedly with St. Helier, neither of them showing any sign of interest in what had just taken place. He was evidently short-sighted and unable to make out who was with her. His opposite number in top-hat whispered something.

Withers stood up, staring hard at that absurd replica of himself whose entry before his own had forestalled him. He must have done some fairly quick guessing, for next moment he was peering about again, and Thornton knew for whom it would be. There was trouble coming. The man was impossible, standing there not even attempting to conceal his feelings. People were noticing now and there was a marked abatement of voices.

"Where's that little devil, Taylor?"

It was heard throughout the dining-room. The egg-shaped Humpty Dumpty on Thornton's right, who for eating purposes had pulled up a visor-like attachment to his mask, furtively lowered it. The movement caught the monk's eye, and next moment it dawned upon him that the egg was Taylor himself. Withers took up a drink and gulped it down:

"Where's that little double-crosser?"

It came more loudly this time. So the man was not going to take it. His intention was becoming clear now—to retrieve himself by making a public scene. He was glaring about him, ignoring the "Shut up!" and "Sit down, Withers!" that came from various quarters. There was no attempt to disguise his hostility to the lot of them now the meaning of that reception had dawned.

Thornton owed it to that little make-up man not to let him down; he also owed it to the Captain. . . . He had undertaken to deal with Withers himself. It was beginning to look as if there might be nothing else for it. . . . The whole thing was becoming odiously cheap. Even his own crowd round him were trying to get Withers to sit down; they hadn't bargained for this.

"You in that damn silly get-up over there, sitting with ——"

That did it. The rest of the sentence was drowned in shouts. Thornton rose quickly, glancing at the Captain's table at the far end. The Captain saw him, regarded him uncertainly for a moment and then nodded.

Somebody else had risen too and was making his way between the tables to where Charles Withers was declaiming violently amidst an uproar and rapidly losing control. Michael St. Helier was smiling reassuringly about him with his Withers' face as he came. He saw Thornton and stopped.

"Who's dealing with this, Padre?"

"I am," Thornton said firmly.

The uproar had ceased as they were seen. Thornton walked up to Withers' table in silence. Charles Withers eased off and stared at him.

"We don't want any Padres butting in on this," came impudently from the St. Helier replica with the wig of tousled hair. There were beads of perspiration breaking through his grease paint. He was well-oiled already.

"All the same," Thornton replied, "you'll kindly address your remarks to me. I'm responsible for that." He nodded in the direction of St. Helier. Charles Withers looked as if he didn't quite grasp his meaning.

"I'm responsible for it," Thornton repeated. "You said something about double-crossing."

The directness of it held Withers up. He glanced at the "Lower Orders" about him. They were looking sheepish and disinclined to support him. The silence throughout the dining-room was ominous.

"Any objections?" Thornton asked.

Withers flared out:

"So you bin pokin' in on my show?"

"Certainly. But you said — double-crossing?"

The man shrugged impatiently and flung out at the room in general:

"I guess you guys'll call off the Padre, or I'll not hold myself responsible." He was reverting rapidly from regulation Hollywood to the vernacular.

There was no response. Thornton stood there, big and formidable, aware that Withers was measuring him up. The man was quite capable of striking him.

"Pipe down, Withers!" came from one of the "Lower Orders."

"You mind your own b——— business!" he retorted, and then turned back to Thornton:

"Will you git back to your place over there!"

"Certainly. When you get out through that door."

Thornton saw his fist clenching, and next moment had his wrist in a vice. It was not the first time he had used his strength to render a man powerless to strike.

"You won't break that grip, but your wrist," he warned him.

"Look here, Padre, this isn't for you," he caught St. Helier's

voice behind him. There was no chance to reply, for Withers was trying to hit out with his free arm. Thornton gave a twist which bent him down until he collapsed abruptly on his chair.

"Will you walk out, or shall we take you?"

Withers sat there glaring and speechless with fury. People were on their feet now in a hubbub.

"Very well. Get hold of that other arm," Thornton told St. Helier over his shoulder. St. Helier grappled with him and did so. At any other moment the sight would have been comic—of the pseudo St. Helier in the grip of the pseudo Charles Withers. The partner in top-hat, who had risen to get out of the way, suddenly roused himself on behalf of Withers by thrusting St. Helier aside:

"Two to one. Keep out of it!"

St. Helier smiled engagingly:

"This'll make it two all." He put his leg behind him, brought his arm round his chest and sat him down on the floor.

It was becoming a public brawl. St. Helier recovered the man's top-hat, handed it to him politely and helped him up with, "I'm sorry, but you asked for it." The man hesitated, began brushing his clothes, decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and retired into the background looking foolish. Thornton who had succeeded in keeping him pinned down gave Withers his choice for the second time:

"Will you walk out, or shall we take you?"

Withers, with his last hope gone, signified scowlingly to Thornton to let go. Thornton did so. Withers stood up, shaking himself and arranging his disordered clothes. The fury was subsiding now that it was useless. A piece of his make-up had come loose and was hanging from his cheek. The St. Helier wig and top-hat were askew. He put them straight, regarding Thornton as if calculating how best to carry it off . . .

Under the circumstances it was not unsuccessful. He achieved his exit with a certain melodramatic dignity, collect-

ing his silver-nobbed cane, walking leisurely towards the doors, and pausing there to shrug. It was to his credit that he could restrain his feelings sufficiently to revert abruptly to the professional comedian. They saw him turn and lift the top-hat to the dining-room, bow to the impassive stewards holding open the doors, place the top-hat on one, the wig on the other, kiss each in turn, and then pass through the door elegantly aloof and swinging the silver-nobbed cane. . .

Thornton returned to his table to be greeted by an outburst of cheering.

## CHAPTER IX

WHETHER it would have happened without that most excellent dinner, relieved of the presence of Charles Withers, was a matter of conjecture.

It did happen however.

The equally excellent drinks may have contributed to the good humour of the masqueraders. Undeniably St. Helier had captured them at the outset with his retaliatory make-up and the easy boyishness with which he had mimicked the professional comedian. The smilingly polite placing of the top-hat partner on the floor coupled with the apology for so doing as he helped him up had intrigued them immensely.

It was with the ending of the dinner however that Michael St. Helier put the seal on his own redemption from the imputations of his previous behaviour. And it was the Captain who supplied him with the opening.

Captain Gibson rose to an ovation openly expressive of their sympathy as well as appreciation of his conduct since the tragedy. At the end of the customary formal speech he paused and looked in the direction of Thornton's table, remarking that the less said about a certain incident that had marred the beginning of the dinner, the better; but he would like to express his gratitude to their R.C. Padre for his handling of an unpleasant situation, aided by an able assistant. . .

The monk to his embarrassment found himself assailed from all sides with "Speech!" Robert Curtin, in a state of bibacious glee over the triumphant dénouement of his machinations, prodded him across the table with his cane until he rose and dismissed the clamour with:

"I don't know what all this is about. I can only say that I was pained beyond words to find a Padre mixed up in a public brawl." There were cheers. An inspiration prompted him to indicate the "Lower Orders" sitting there gloomily out

of it all, and then nod to Michael St. Helier, who was likewise assailed for a "Speech!"

The gesture was not lost upon him and he was on his feet immediately, pulling away the plastic make-up from his face and removing the wig of oiled hair, with: "The able assistant's only personal regret is that he was deprived of 'God bless the squire and his relations and keep us in our proper stations.'"

The boldness of it not only startled them, coming from the "snob" for whom the parody had been intended, but appealed to their sense of sportsmanship. The "Lower Orders," amidst laughter, were called upon for their rendering of the parody, and gave it. The partner in the top-hat, now recovered from the indignity of his session on the floor, responded to the general goodwill by "publicly dissociating" himself and his crowd from what had happened earlier. . . A stout man, in clown's dress, rose solemnly and tactlessly to declare that he, for one, was not yet assured as to the behaviour of Mr. Charles Withers in another respect; they would doubtless understand to what he referred. "Were any steps being taken ——

"Please, Mr. Clown!"

It was Bo-Peep, who had sprung to her feet before he could proceed further. She waited until the clapping which greeted her subsided:

"I understand exactly to what Mr. Clown refers; but, since it's a private matter, I would much sooner it were left in the hands of the Padre and his able assistant."

There were murmurs of approval, and the stout clown subsided into the obscurity from which he had momentarily emerged. Thornton wondered whether the popular Gabrielle St. Laurence was aware of how the private matter had become public property.

Robert Curtin was innocently replenishing his glass.

"Wal, Padre, you can thank your lucky star. And I'll not deny your young Archangel's got away with it . . . Whoopee!" Another balloon went. "And I'll agree with the Captain, the less said about that tough stuff of yours the better. This ent Canada, Padre."

"Quite. It wouldn't appeal to you of course," Thornton returned.

He could certainly thank his lucky star. This masquerade dinner had served Michael St. Helier so happily that it would now be almost superfluous to champion his cause. He was to learn the following morning from Miss St. Laurence that St. Helier had availed himself of the masquerade ball following the dinner to fulfil his promise manfully and blossom out into a most sociable young man by dancing with nine young ladies in all.

Charles Withers wisely did not appear at the masquerade ball. Instead, Thornton, braced for a stormy reception, turned up, whilst it was in progress, at his cabin where Withers had confined himself for the evening.

He found the man sitting moodily alone, the make-up removed, more or less sober, and to the monk's surprise not unwilling to see him. He was evidently half expecting him to turn up.

"Do you mind?"

Charles Withers pointed to a chair by way of answer. Thornton took it. Withers further surprised him by handing him a box of cigarettes and producing a bottle of whiskey. It wasn't looking like the outburst he had anticipated over what had happened only a couple of hours before.

"I was reckonin' on you coming along. Say, will you tell me just what that racket was about?"

Withers handed him his drink, gulped his own down neat and then sat down, waiting.

"You mean, why you were turned out?" Thornton asked.

"The turnin' out don't want explainin'. You're a tough guy at handlin', for a Padre; and that's all there is to it. But you said you was responsible for that take-off — meanin' what?"

"Meaning that I put Taylor up to it."

"The make-up? I got that. And I was just slargin' words when I called it double-crossing; so I'll take that back. . . But

I been tryin' to figure out what in hell that crowd was doin' turnin' down my show."

So there was a motive behind the comparative affability.

"I wasn't responsible for that. And they were not turning down your show. They were turning down Charles Withers."

Withers stared at him.

"Me? Say, what for?"

The tone of it suggested that the notion was preposterous.

"Miss St. Laurence happens to be an extremely popular young person on board."

It gave him an inkling, and brought a defiant glint into his eyes.

"And what's that to do with it?"

"Miss St. Laurence happens to be a lady."

"Oh, yeah. So what?"

If he wanted the truth he should have it.

"She is accustomed to gentlemen."

For a moment Thornton thought he was for it. Withers however managed to keep himself in hand.

"Meanin' I'm not?"

"Meaning that it's usual with gentlemen to regard ladies as such."

The man knew exactly to what he referred, as his retort showed:

"Been puttin' it round, has she?"

"No," Thornton replied, "ladies don't do that."

He shrugged irritably:

"Yah, stop beatin' about!"

Thornton answered sharply, "I said, ladies don't do that!"

"How'd *you* get the dope on it, then?"

He was asking for it.

"Very well. Charles Withers, you're an objectionable person; in the opinion of the boat highly objectionable. . . Listen, please. I'm sorry to tell you this while I'm drinking your whiskey, but you've left me no choice." He proceeded to inform him that Miss St. Laurence had given nobody the "dope on it," but had appealed to the Captain privately for protection

from Withers' attentions which had included some foul remarks outside her cabin window; the Captain had consulted Thornton about it, and allowed him to act on his behalf, which was why he was here. Neither of them had been "putting it round," but he had no intention of enlightening Withers as to how it had become public. Thornton was not giving Robert Curtin away.

Charles Withers sat there digesting this. He made no attempt to question the statement, presumably accepting its truth. It was his vanity that had received the shock, for he fastened on the one point that touched him personally:

"'Highly objectionable' ent the opinion about Charles Withers in Hollywood."

"Possibly you've never been told in Hollywood. And I imagine you are somewhat impenetrable."

"Impenetrable? Will you put that so as I can understand?"

Thornton didn't hesitate to do so:

"Can you understand if I put it that you're not quite as popular with other people as you appear to be with yourself?"

"Say, that's insultin'!"

Thornton pointed out that Miss St. Laurence was the insulted party, not Charles Withers.

"Miss St. Laurence's an English aristocrat that considers an American movie man ent a fit person to talk to."

Thornton agreed that the American movie man, on his own showing, was not a fit person for Miss St. Laurence to talk to.

"Say, don't you ——"

The monk interrupted him firmly:

"We'll drop arguing, if you don't mind."

Without wasting further time, for the man was only concerned with bolstering up his own self-esteem, Thornton presented an ultimatum:

"Charles Withers, you will apologise to Miss St. Laurence, and you will cease molesting her, or ——"

"And who in hell are you, tellin' me!"

"—— or would you prefer ostracism for the rest of the

voyage? I'm telling you because the Captain's given me a free hand to deal with you."

It pulled him up. He lit a cigarette, glancing at Thornton and inhaling rapidly, then shifted restlessly. He was cornered and knew it. The last thing a man of his type would appreciate would be ostracism. He had had a taste of it this evening and found it highly unpalatable. His decision was assisted with:

"I can imagine that it wouldn't improve your reputation in Hollywood. There're some American pressmen on board."

He had evidently overlooked the fact. A nervous, calculating look came into his eyes.

"You've given them quite a good story already — this evening." There was no escape from it. His tone changed noticeably: "If I apologise to Miss St. Laurence, will you call 'em off that story?"

"I'll do my best."

"And if I apologise, is that crowd on speakin' terms again, so as the press boys'll forget about it?"

Thornton said he would see to it that the fact of the apology was circularised (Robert Curtin?). He would also use whatever influence he had on the other's behalf.

"Wal, I'll apologise."

"Very good."

It was opportunism to safeguard his own interests. The apology would be perfunctory. More than that could hardly be hoped for from the man. . . Thornton drained his glass, observing the other filling his own for the third time in the space of twenty minutes.

"Well, good night."

Thornton walked to the door. As he opened it the strains of the masquerade dance-band reached them from the Lounge, and the hum of voices and laughter. Thornton caught a glimpse of the other listening for a moment to what he had been debarred from, emptying his glass in a sudden return of fury, and his hand reaching out again for the bottle.

He closed the door behind him, and stood there hesitating,

wondering whether to leave him alone, gulping down whiskey like milk from sheer ill-humour at the position. . . Withers was disqualified by his own impossible behaviour, and knew it; frustrated of Miss St. Laurence; turned down by the whole boat. . . It was not an enviable situation.

The monk walked slowly along the corridor, pausing again at the end. He would have to find Michael St. Helier and congratulate him. . . The young man's cabin was empty when he reached it. St. Helier was probably in the Lounge.

Thornton did not go to the Lounge, but instead found himself once more outside Withers' cabin, standing there undecided.

He heard a sudden crash and a splintering of glass. That settled it. He opened the door and went in. Withers was standing, staring stupidly at the results of his own fury—the glass which he had apparently flung at the wall shattered into fragments on the floor.

Thornton said nothing, but stooped down and got to work picking up the bits. It took him a couple of minutes. He raised himself and looked about. On the cabin escritoire there was a packet of large envelopes. He helped himself to one, put the glass inside, screwed up the envelope and dropped it out of the port-hole. He turned to find Withers, sobered by his own action, staring at him uncomfortably.

Thornton looked at the whiskey bottle on the table, enquiringly. Withers regarded him bemusedly for a moment and then the bottle likewise. He picked it up, went unsteadily to the port-hole and pitched it out after the package of glass.

Thornton said, "Good night" again, let himself out for the second time and returned to his cabin.

Whether it was picking up those pieces of glass for him, Thornton never quite knew. It could scarcely be accounted for by his browbeating of the man into the apology which Gabrielle St. Laurence received the next morning. What Thornton *did* know however was that from that night onwards there was a noticeable change in Charles Withers.

## CHAPTER X

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

*I am aware that the aspect of Michael St. Helier's mentality with which I shall be mainly concerned from now onwards, may appear somewhat incomprehensible in these days when horrors and hideousness are accepted as a matter of course; I am writing this during the war.*

*It is possible, however, that the average attitude to it all may be less rational than that of Michael St. Helier; for mechanised total war, could we but see it, with its incredible brutalities and mass-destruction, is the supremacy of human irrationality and folly.*

*The problem of Michael St. Helier is not the problem of a neurotic. Neither is it the problem of a crank. It is the problem of sane values, and the problem of an unwavering conviction.*

*The story of Michael St. Helier is the story of that conviction as the monk saw it, and saw it out to its inevitable end.*

THE MONK leaned forward from his seat beneath the cabin-window and examined one of the books on the table — to give St. Helier time.

He had just been acquainting him with the main facts about Charles Withers since the man's exit from the dining-room the previous evening. "Poor devil," had been St. Helier's comment on hearing of the ostracism with which Withers was already meeting.

He had asked, when Thornton congratulated him on his performance at the masquerade dinner: "Was it all right? I mean, was it the kind of thing you wanted?"

"Absolutely. I didn't know you had it in you."

The other had regarded him curiously.

"Look here, Padre, I haven't the conceit to imagine —

There was somebody behind it? It was too absurdly easy."

Thornton had maintained silence over Robert Curtin's part; he glossed it over with:

"You can count me out for one. . . Now, what's this about yourself? You're going to tell me something?"

He looked up. St. Helier's lips were trembling slightly. The doctor in Thornton noticed the pulse in his neck working. It was only with an effort he was bringing himself to it even now — to this "talk about myself."

"You thought I was being rude, didn't you," came at length, "that first evening, in the garden-room?"

The monk answered in a matter of fact voice:

"Rude? Your manners went west certainly. No, I simply couldn't make you out. I wondered for the moment whether you were some appalling kind of prig; but you were in far too deadly earnest."

"I was unreasonable?"

"Well, it's hardly reasonable to turn a man down for referring to a fact of common experience."

"I realised that afterwards; that's why I apologised."

"Still, I scandalised you?"

St. Helier answered firmly, if politely:

"I assumed that a monk would loathe that kind of thing, as I loathe it — vileness, bloodiness, hideousness."

"The monk probably does; he's experienced a good deal of it. We're disagreed more about —— No, I'll keep off that."

The other looked grateful.

"Can you understand a man loathing it so that he's thrown off his balance, when he's brought up against a thing like that boat going down the other night? That wasn't cowardice, you know. You said I was being called a coward."

"I never thought it was cowardice. I was one of the few who saw it; you couldn't help it. Only a fool would call you a coward after last night."

St. Helier shrugged indifferently. It was again borne upon the monk that opinions either way about himself mattered

very little. The other was suddenly colouring and swallowing.

"I —— I want to tell you why I'm like this. I don't think you could even guess."

The monk answered leisurely, to put him at ease:

"I don't think I could. . . No, I'm mystified. I imagine it's partly physical repugnance, and partly psychological."

"Physical repugnance? I detest horrors and blood and all that kind of thing, if that's what you mean. But that's not all. Good heavens, no! . . . And I don't think it's psychological. I'm not a neurasthenic."

"No, I decided you were not, last night. You should be, but you're not. There's something I can't fathom in you. It's more than just war and horrors?"

There was an appealing look in the expressive brown eyes: "Padre, will you promise to listen until I've finished?"

"I'll promise that, yes."

"Because I may say things you won't like."

"Anyway, say them."

The monk leaned back against the panelling.

It took him some twenty minutes. From the start it was manifest that only with extreme reluctance was he talking about himself at all. The monk was not even tempted to interrupt; for instead of subjecting him to the outpourings of an introvert, St. Helier was almost pleading with him to understand a young man's passionate devotion to an ideal. For all his embarrassment over it he found no difficulty in expressing himself; he must have been at considerable pains beforehand over what he would say. The monk found himself listening to a St. Helier about as far removed from the hysteria of the night of the tragedy as from that take-off of Charles Withers the previous evening.

He quoted Browning and also Francis Thompson without affectation, to illustrate what he was driving at. His reluctance was almost forgotten in his eagerness that "the only person

I've ever dreamed of telling" should see things as he saw them himself.

It was all quite unexpected, and it gave the monk an insight into the normally calm composure, St. Helier's most marked characteristic; for it came to him as he listened that it was the detachment of the visionary, rather than of indifference to people and things. He was only twenty? With the reflective outlook of men twice his age. The dreaminess in his eyes, those books on flowers, his love of gardens?

Thornton could see it now partly.

It was not the first time he had listened to youth pouring out its idealisms — often sentimentalisms. It was the first time he had listened to idealisms which were an actual philosophy of life.

The preliminary apology had hardly been needed; for though not theologically expressed, his ideas might have been culled from St. John of the Cross. So much so that the monk, when he came to a halt, asked:

"Why did you think I mightn't like it?"

"I wasn't sure — Well, is it quite orthodox and all that?"

"I should say it's most orthodox and all that."

"Do you really mean it?"

"I do. And I'm very grateful."

"Grateful?"

"For the reminder."

Out of courtesy St. Helier refrained from asking what reminder, even if he guessed. The monk meant it quite sincerely. It was only too easy for a priest, toiling amidst ugliness and sin, to overlook what St. Helier had learned with no philosophy or theology but his own — that, for all its incidental unloveliness, the world was ineffably beautiful with the immanence of Eternal Beauty Himself.

"You've more to tell me, haven't you?"

St. Helier fingered one of the books on the table. He was at ease now.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because something must have happened —— This didn't just come to you?"

"Something *did* happen."

He was still for a moment, the dreaminess in his eyes very marked.

"I'm sorry I said you wouldn't understand, that evening. Padre, listen."

The monk leaned back again.

It had happened to him whilst he was still at his public-school — the "spiritual experience" whose incompatibility with "beastliness and that sort of thing" had isolated him from certain former friends and left him more or less in a world of his own, so the monk gathered.

He described the occasion, ". . . in a wood in the spring, bluebells and all the rest — the kind of thing that makes you hold your breath, the sheer beauty of it. Have you felt that silence in woods, because it *is* something you feel? The sounds make it more silent. It's a living silence, the notes of birds, wings, voices echoing in a haunting, exciting way. The outside world seems far away. I'm not putting it very well; it's the first time I've talked about these things. . . ."

He had climbed a tree, a habit with him in those days, and was sitting straddled on a branch amidst green foliage with the blue of heaven showing through. He didn't know how far it was his own imagination, but he couldn't have imagined the whole "experience," for it was accompanied by an almost unbearable happiness. The colours, the scents of the woods seemed to be intensified. He could remember the clumps of anemones, and violets and primroses beneath, their hues taking on a vividness he had never seen in them before. How it came to him he wasn't sure, but it was not by reasoning — that they were living by a life that was more than their own natural life; the miracle of spring which had always fascinated him with its sense of resurrection, was not a thing that just happened. He saw *why* it happened — the Life behind nat-

ural life and within it, "urging it on," and without which there could be no spring at all. It was as though there were a compulsion almost upon him to understand this.

He didn't think it was subjective—the gradual awareness of a tremendous Presence filling the woods; it was too definite, as of a Personal Presence, Someone wanting him to understand. He hadn't been exactly afraid, partly perhaps. It was more that he had felt utterly small and humbled before an Immensity infinitely beyond everything visible and tangible; the beauty around him was gathered up into this tremendous Presence, the source of its ineffable loveliness.

It was the compulsion upon him to understand that he had felt so forcibly, as though nothing mattered except that he *should* understand. How far at the moment he had comprehended the full significance of it, he couldn't say. But he did know that when the sense of that mighty Presence had left him and he had "come back" to himself, some radical change had taken place deep down in his soul.

It had come to him later, and only gradually, that the Presence had been that of the Creator of his own soul to Whom the whole homage of his being was due. . .

He was watching the monk's face anxiously, although there was an atmosphere of relief about him.

Thornton said nothing for a while, but began filling his pipe, giving himself time. He would have preferred to think it all out alone first, but St. Helier was waiting for a verdict. The monk had been alert all through for something not "quite orthodox and all that." He had been unable to detect it. The choice of words had been careful throughout. If he had had any qualms, that last unambiguous affirmation had set them at rest. The "experience" had left no pantheistical notions in St. Helier's mind; he had stressed the "Personal" aspect of the tremendous Presence, Whose nature, if obscurely at the time, he had at any rate ultimately identified with that of his Creator. There was a permissible criticism however, and the monk put it:

"Michael, do you mind if I make a comment?"

"N—— no, Padre. Of course not."

"I'm not suggesting hallucination, or anything of that kind. I'm assuming, because I can't see anything against it, that the experience was actual. But I can't quite see any particular reason for it happening like that; I mean, from what you've told me. Except of course that it helped you to understand certain things vividly. Still, they're all things that are understandable without an 'experience' . . . There *is* an experience, by the way, called cosmic consciousness."

"I know; moments of intense appreciation of the Divine in nature."

The monk smiled; young Michael's studies, he was discovering, were as intensive as his thinking.

"You've explored that possibility?"

"Yes. I don't think it was just that."

The monk asked him direct:

"You think it was given you for some special purpose?"

St. Helier answered without hesitation:

"Yes. I saw that later."

He waited, looking away through the cabin-window into the distance.

"I used to almost worship nature, even as a kid; but without any reference whatever to its Creator, as far as I can remember. I don't think I even considered such a Being. My father's an agnostic, and — well, I'd not very much chance."

He left the implication to be gathered.

"It had to be brought home to you, the Creatorship of nature?"

St. Helier nodded.

The monk lit his pipe, and watched a cloud of smoke drifting. So St. Helier believed that Almighty God had singled out a schoolboy and given him what was commonly termed a private revelation, on that April day in the woods, for the particular purpose of showing him something to which he had inadvertently been blind.

The monk wondered — could he believe it himself?

There was nothing intrinsically impossible in the happening itself. And, as far as he could judge, nothing intrinsically improbable. St. Helier's quiet conviction was in his favour. The "experience" seemed to have raised his moral outlook on life; he had given up bad companionships. There had been nothing hectic in his narration. No particular effort to convince; more that he wanted to be understood. . .

The monk reverted to what had led up to this unburdening of a long-guarded secret until now locked in the other's soul — his behaviour in the garden-room, the pitiful reaction to that ocean tragedy, the way in which, for all the initial disappointment in himself, St. Helier had been driven to confide. He had almost forgotten in his own absorption what had prompted the other to confide at all — the need of accounting for the behaviour that had been so baffling; that inordinate revulsion from horrors.

He asked him tentatively:

"Is this what you were going to tell me in the garden-room?"

"I'd meant to, yes."

"I see. . . You don't still think that I'm incapable of understanding?"

The answer was frank enough:

"What I've just told you? No, you *do* understand. I was prepared for scepticism."

He paused.

"You don't quite see the connection yet, though?"

"No, I don't. You were going to tell me — — —"

"Why I loathe certain things. . . And why I can't help — — — you've seen it happen."

There was pain now in those dark expressive eyes.

"That incident in the woods has to do with it somehow?"  
the monk helped. St. Helier leaned forward:

"Can you imagine it colouring a man's whole outlook on life?"

"Very easily."

"Including his convictions?"

"Oh, yes."

St. Helier's body tensed:

"Very well. Can you believe me when I tell you that it taught me to hate everything, every kind of thing, that was irreconcilable?"

It came almost fanatically and gave the monk the first definite insight into the connection of what the other had just told him with the conduct he had witnessed.

"You mean irreconcilable with what you were given to understand?"

St. Helier nodded. His lips were trembling again.

"Because in some way ugliness and horrors and all the rest don't fit in with it?"

"Fit in? They *can't*," came passionately. "They're in violent contradiction."

With the Creatorship of nature? "They *can't*," sounded like a personal protest. The monk remembered his stress on the Personal Presence laying a kind of obligation on him after what had been vouchsafed.

"You mean in violent contradiction with what you experienced? You'd be disloyal to that vision if you attempted to reconcile ——"

"I mean much more than that. I'd be blasphemous if I thought they weren't as loathsome to God as they are to me. And that's putting it mildly. Would you expect me to believe —— Good heavens, does God get a thrill out of war!"

So it was that? Thornton could understand now the disappointment in himself of the young man who had known Eternal Beauty in the woods that day and "never dreamed of telling it" until he met a monk. . . . "Tell me if I'm wrong; but it comes to this, doesn't it — it's ugliness and hideousness of every kind; they're in conflict with something sacred to you, your idealistic conception of things. That's why you say they're loathsome to God; He gave you that conception Himself. It hurt you badly that a monk should see something thrilling in war; it sounded like disloyalty to the God he professed to serve?"

The other said nothing. The monk added after a moment, "Yes, I understand now — you refuse them any entry, they're an intrusion . . . they've to be kept out of sight."

"I *can't* keep them out of sight!" came fiercely. "I *had* to see that boat go down. I'd not have — it wouldn't have happened to me if I'd got away in time!"

The veins were standing out on his forehead. There was no dreaminess in his eyes now, but a horrid fear showing that spoke for itself and dispensed with any further need of questions. This was something definite that had to be tackled before they could go any further. The monk pointed to the cigarette-box on the table:

"You'd better smoke. I want you to listen."

He told him firmly:

"It'll not be easy, but you'll *have* to listen, unless you want to mess up your whole life. That thing will happen again and again, and you'll be labelled mental if it goes on. There's no need for it to go on; you're a perfectly healthy-minded young man in the ordinary way —"

"My God, I've been through hell at times! There was a man killed under a bus and I couldn't get away then —"

"Quite," the monk cut him off. "But I want you to calm down, or you'll not take in what I'm going to tell you."

The firmness of it held him up. He looked hesitant for a moment. The monk leaned forward and pushed the cigarette-box nearer. St. Helier helped himself shakily and lit up.

"All right, Padre."

The monk pressed down the ash in the bowl of his pipe:

"Michael, I don't want to hurt your feelings. I *do* believe that experience in the woods was given you by Almighty God, for his own purposes; but *never* for that nightmare you've made out of it. . . Now, listen."

## CHAPTER XI

THE SAPPHIRE blue of the Pacific, no longer the grey Atlantic, stretched away to the horizon. They were cooling off after the torrid heat of the Equator. Soon it would be New Zealand and, for the monk, the ending of those weeks of leisure he had almost greedily anticipated; although the leisure had turned out somewhat of a mirage.

It was not the Congress addresses, which had been easily completed by the time they were crossing the Caribbean; it was Michael St. Helier and Gabrielle St. Laurence and, to an extent, Charles Withers, who had occupied his time and in the human order of things his interest.

There had been certain developments since that evening, three weeks ago, when Michael St. Helier had unburdened his soul.

The Hollywood comedian had unquestionably pulled himself together under the painfully sobering influence of public ostracism and the compelled apology to Gabrielle St. Laurence. He had made it up with the little man Taylor. At Thornton's suggestion, though reluctantly, he had apologised publicly at dinner for the scene he had created on the night of the masquerade, and in consequence the ostracism had lifted to a considerable extent; the ban on the film star was now confined to a minority.

Thornton had done his bit as promised, to soften down feeling against the man. So also had Robert Curtin in common sportsmanship. Between them they had persuaded the pressmen on board to leave the "story" alone. That flinging of the bottle through the port-hole had been followed by a period of abstention from what had been his undoing; Charles Withers at any rate was no longer over-drinking. He had been anxious to let the monk know this, and the monk liked him for it.

And strangely enough the young man whom Charles With-

ers had marked down for the ship's boob, had become one of the film star's supporters. Michael St. Helier had shown no malice, in fact the reverse. If public opinion meant nothing to himself he could see that it meant everything to a Hollywood comedian, and had deliberately set about cultivating him. The young man who had previously been most unpopular himself and now was almost a vogue, and rather uncomfortable about it, had proved that he could translate his idealism into practical terms.

It had given Thornton a further insight into St. Helier's character — the latter was egocentric on one point alone, he could be self-forgetful and immensely charitable when it came to others.

Charles Withers had responded in some embarrassment, grateful though for whatever contributed to his re-establishment. On the evening the liner had berthed at Kingston, Jamaica, Gabrielle St. Laurence had been astounded by the spectacle of Thornton, Michael St. Helier and Charles Withers all going ashore together, three figures in white tropical suits. Robert Curtin at her side watching the trio from the taffrail had glanced round at the onlookers: "That's put 'em pop-eyed."

The incongruity of it all, or perhaps the humour, had struck Charles Withers himself; on their return he had remarked to St. Helier: "Wal, when you write home to that Viscount dad of yours, jest tell him you're sure mixing with the lower orders." The Hollywood comedian made no pretensions to the breeding inherent in St. Helier.

There had been another development since that evening three weeks ago, one which the monk had noted with considerable concern. Gabrielle St. Laurence after the first flush of excitement over St. Helier's absurd triumph at the masquerade, had quietly adopted an attitude to her protégé which was that of probably the majority on board.

St. Helier had retrieved himself, it was true, from the accusation of cowardice. His conscientious sociability after the

aloofness, with his easy manners had made him genuinely liked; but Thornton knew it unhappily for a fact that for the most part he was regarded not unlike a mentally deficient child for that pitiful exhibition on deck, and it was the kind of thing that couldn't be forgotten. Gabrielle St. Laurence herself had not forgotten, for all her easy way with him and their bantering manner together.

It came out almost imperceptibly, but it was there — her attitude of motherliness towards St. Helier, or rather that of a kind nurse to a patient. A young man of twenty had behaved like an hysterical schoolgirl in public and, as far as she knew, offered not a word of excuse or explanation. His very silence led to the assumption that he was unaware of anything particularly abnormal, and therefore a psychological case. The monk had admitted to himself that she could scarcely be blamed for her attitude.

He could tell her nothing of what had transpired on the one occasion when St. Helier had opened out. That compartment of his soul had been unlocked to himself alone. He had, very tentatively, suggested to him that it might be wise to enlighten Miss St. Laurence, sufficiently at least to set her qualms at rest. The monk had pointed out that it would be only fair to himself. St. Helier had at first refused politely to do anything of the kind; his life was his own and people must take him or leave him. He had yielded finally, however, to the extent of: "Well, I'll think about it." Thornton had left it at that.

The monk had seen one thing clearly, talking to St. Helier quietly on that evening after the outpouring of that pent-up secret within; the other must *never*, under any condition, resume that sealed-up existence for which Chesters had been largely responsible. He had taken it upon himself, without hesitation, to urge upon him not even to attempt a second time a life that was no home-life at all. There was no need. He was independent, with a liberal banking account of his own

(due to his grandfather) which his father and stepmother couldn't touch. He had already broken with Chesters for the time being, as it was.

Apart from that, there was his future; he would have to work, take up a profession, marry or something — anything to occupy his mind.

The monk had tried to straighten out his twisted notions and no more at the time; for St. Helier, when calmer, had listened, recognising that his future was at stake, and that exhibition of himself had at any cost to stop.

It had been a matter more or less of rationalising what lay behind that horrid fear of everything hideous and repellent — the conviction he had drawn from that experience in the woods.

The monk could appreciate the loyalty of the boy to whom that understanding of Eternal Beauty had been given — loyalty to a Being Whose creation was ineffably glorious. He could follow too the twisted workings of his mind — his notion of creation crystallising into an abhorrence of what he insisted must be abhorrent to his Creator; ultimately into a conception of evil and all ugliness which amounted to a monstrous malignancy stalking the earth, venting its malice on loveliness, destroying, leaving in its wake hideousness and the "horrors" that were his dread.

That much the monk had elicited when St. Helier had quietened down from his, "My God, I've been through hell . . ." and listened to a priest assuring him that his mental torture, whatever its source, was self-inflicted.

There was an element of truth in his assumption — the monk hadn't denied it. The malignancy stalking the earth, though, was a living person, not a blind malign force — Satan, anything but the myth of modernism. St. Helier had asked whether Catholics believed it, and, to his surprise, been assured that they did, and that they also believed in Satanism.

The monk had not disputed his conception of the Creator, nor that creation as it left the hands of the Infinite, could be anything but ineffably glorious. What he couldn't allow was

the other's conclusion — creation of its very nature precluding everything abhorrent; he was attributing to a finite creation the infinite perfection of the Creator. St. Helier's further conclusion he could only repudiate entirely — his malign force, or whatever it was, malevolently "commuting" creation, investing whatever it "touched" with something intrinsically evil. He had asked him direct if he meant that the ugly things of life were moral evils. "Yes, every bit as evil as sin," his fevered imagination had seen it; beauty commuted into hideousness no longer God's creation, outside His Own order, intolerable to Eternal Beauty.

What the monk had been subconsciously waiting for had come at length — Michael St. Helier had convinced himself that to contact with this malignancy inherent in everything hideous was to contaminate oneself physically and spiritually.

The monk had understood then — everything; his abnormal dread of horrors, war, that tragedy of the boat going down.

He was obsessed by his fear of contamination.

He had asked him whether he believed God to be omnipotent.

St. Helier had hesitated. And that hesitation had been sufficient. The monk had told him firmly he would have to begin again at the beginning.

With a God who was not powerless to protect him, and whose world was still in His Own hands.

He had reasoned with him sufficiently for St. Helier to see that his esoteric conviction was at best no more than an hypothesis of his own, and that he had either to abandon it, or the disastrous effect of it upon himself would continue. He had advised him to get down to the *facts* of religion and straighten out his ideas.

And there the monk had left it.

It had been enough, for the moment, that that long-postponed "talk about myself" had been achieved. One thing he had learned about Michael St. Helier; however twisted his notions, he was deeply spiritually-minded, and there were in him the makings of a saint.

After laying bare his soul St. Helier had subsided into virtual silence about himself. Thornton had made no attempt to break into that silence. From occasional remarks when they were alone, and from the fact that St. Helier had asked him for "any book, if you've got one, of a doctrinal nature," he had concluded that he was thinking. He had given him a book he had with him. St. Helier's request for it suggested that he was at least willing to examine the "facts."

Meanwhile the son of Viscount St. Helier had maintained his self-imposed sociability, played deck-games with an amused smile upon his face, and patronised the swimming pool daily while crossing the Caribbean and Equatorial seas, the Band of Hope in a flutter as to what to make of this contradictory-behavioured young man.

## CHAPTER XII

THE MONK had decided to tackle Gabrielle St. Laurence for himself. Her attitude to St. Helier had remained unchanged. There would be no breakage of confidence.

On the evening of their leaving Pitcairn Island, he found himself leaning against the taffrail at her side watching the flying-fish scintillating over the ultramarine surface of the waters.

"Do you mind my being appallingly personal?"

She turned and looked up at him.

"Personal? What about?"

He plunged without any preliminaries:

"Our Michael is not a mental case, you know."

She coloured confusedly.

"W —— what do you mean?"

"Well, you rather regard him as one, don't you?"

"Do I?"

"Perhaps you do it unconsciously. It's your attitude to him, as if he wasn't quite all there."

"Oh, dear."

She remained thinking, as though something had occurred to her.

"Is this what —— He was trying to say something — I forget when, a day or two ago — but I couldn't make out what he was driving at, he kept getting stuck; except that he hoped I didn't think him a looney. Something like that. He said in the end it didn't really matter, and dropped it."

Thornton was frowning to himself. So St. Helier had tried to tell her, and made a mess of it. He almost wished he had left it alone now.

"My dear Gabrielle, I advised him to make it clear to you that he was not a lunatic, that was all; not make himself look more like one. He was trying to explain why that hysterical busi-

ness happened that night, and I suppose he found he couldn't. I can't tell you myself, because I'd be giving away confidences. You regard him as you do, because of that business, don't you?"

"Well, it was hardly normal, was it, behaving like that?"

Thornton wondered how to make her understand, without giving anything away. He wanted her to understand. And for an excellent unmentionable reason of his own. A possibility had been dawning on him recently. A possibility . . .

"Look here, will you take my word for it? He's told me everything. I mean, about himself. There's a perfectly simple explanation, and I assure you that you can treat him as a normal, healthy-minded young man."

She looked doubtful.

"He's perfectly normal in most things, I know."

Thornton tried:

"It's that wonderful charity of yours, Gabrielle. You see everybody as somebody to be mothered, helped. Our Michael's a sort of patient to you — poor boy, he's peculiar, we must be very tender to him."

She smiled in spite of herself, and tried to evade with:

"Well, we rag each other enough."

"Of course you do. We must take him out of himself, sort of thing."

She remained polishing the taffrail with her finger, her eyes down. He had caught something in their blue depths that puzzled him; and for some reason she was colouring again. She said rather quickly and more as if to close the matter:

"All right, Padre. Thank you for the hint. I'll try and treat him as — what did you call it? — a normal, healthy-minded young man."

"That's better."

It sounded flat. He waited for a moment, quite for what he didn't know. She said no more, however.

He murmured that he would have to move off.

Making his way along the deck it struck him that she had not required very much convincing and that there had been no real ring of conviction about her attitude. The impression he had

received was more of a policy than an attitude. He could only conjecture, but it looked too much like an adopted policy. To safeguard their relations? St. Helier was a young man who must be helped, nothing more?

It was the first time Thornton had known her on her guard.

He found Michael waiting for him in his cabin, the latter having announced to him in the morning that he had been through the book he had been given and would like to talk over certain things.

When the monk had ensconced himself under the deck-window, St. Helier moved his chair to face him and without wasting time proceeded to plump on him something for which he was totally unprepared:

"I've been thinking about the future, Padre."

"Oh, yes?"

"My own future. I'll have to do something; I can't just drift through life. And my sole practical interest is in gardening."

Thornton said smilingly:

"No, you could hardly be a gardener."

He had missed his meaning.

"Why not?" came back promptly.

It sounded like a challenge.

"Well, why not?" he repeated.

Thornton felt suddenly disconcerted. St. Helier appeared to be serious.

"You mean gardening for a hobby?"

"No. I mean a common or garden gardener."

Thornton stared at him. He was not even saying it humorously.

"What, and earn your living by it?"

"And earn my living by it."

Thornton began rubbing his chin, completely stuck. He ventured lamely:

"But, you don't need to earn your living in that way."

"No. I don't *need* to."

The monk stuck again.

"If you're thinking of my income, I'll have plenty of use for that."

"Oh? . . . Yes, of course."

Thornton found his mind flashing back to Gabrielle St. Laurence. What on earth would she —

"Do you mind giving me a minute to digest this?"

The digestive process consisted in a hasty attempt to put into definite shape what had been simmering in the background of his thoughts. That possibility . . . St. Helier had confided to him the intimate things of his soul. He had been able to do something in the way of dispersing that nightmare obsession; all the same the other could *not* afford risks. A lonely existence would be a risk. He needed desperately someone to whom he could talk freely about himself, a safety valve. Providence had seen to it that . . . He nearly smiled; it looked so ridiculously like the pantomime fairy popping up in the nick of time. . . Still, hang it all, Gabrielle St. Laurence *had* turned up. . . They were excellent friends. Of the same social standing. She was everything that . . .

"I say, I wish you'd talk to our Gabrielle about this. I don't know that I'm much good at other people's futures."

"About being a gardener?" came prosaically.

"Well, it would be interesting to get her opinion."

"Oh, all right, if you like."

He wasn't in the least interested in getting her opinion.

The monk contemplated him.

"You're serious?"

"Quite serious."

"But it's only just occurred to you, hasn't it?"

St. Helier considered.

"I wouldn't say it's only just occurred. I've seen ever since I left that it would be pretty futile to go back to Chesters and that I'd have to do something. You've confirmed that. I used to envy the gardeners at Chesters, and wonder why I couldn't be one. It may partly have been my father and his hatefulness about the 'lower orders.' I used to think — don't laugh at this — but I did think how splendid it would be if one could

sort of hit back at him—I know it was uncharitable—by taking up some ordinary working-man's job; defy the whole lot of them, my stepmother and those hunting snobs with nothing to do but eat and drink and hunt—their beastly sexual lives. . . Still, it's not that now, Padre."

He stopped, a passionate light suddenly in his eyes.

"Contemplatives have done it, haven't they?"

It almost startled Thornton.

"Contemplatives? Done what exactly?"

"Well, something quite simple. Gardening, generally."

"Yes, that's true."

"Christ was a carpenter."

"Yes."

There was a pause. St. Helier in his courteous way was challenging him to produce a valid reason as to why he should not become a gardener. Contemplatives?

"Why do you instance Contemplatives?"

"I suppose because I've read so many of them."

The monk wondered how much more there was to discover about Michael St. Helier, who was twenty, not even a Catholic, and seemingly on familiar terms with the Contemplatives.

"You've read St. John of the Cross?"

St. Helier reached round, pulled open a drawer of his cabin-bureau, found something and held it up. The monk stared at a leather-bound edition of "The Ascent of Mount Carmel." He knew what it contained—that profundity of supernatural wisdom, the compelling appeal to the soul of man for the abandonment of creatures in exchange for the knowledge of God. St. Helier put it back and turned facing him. The light was still in his eyes, but he was curiously calm.

"Padre, I'm not forgetting what you said. I *do* understand now that one can't live in a closed-in world of one's own, and that it's appallingly easy to form conceptions of one's own and attribute them to the Almighty. I *am* trying to begin again from the beginning." He picked up the book the monk had lent him. "That's helped tremendously. I didn't like it at first—the insistence on dogma; it seemed so restrictive. I'd

never thought of the spiritual life except as subjective, and I suppose that's why there's always been something elusive to me about the Contemplatives. Something's presupposed. They were —— I don't quite know how to put it."

"Anchored?" the monk supplied. He had noticed before St. Helier's use of concise diction when he was talking calmly.

"Yes, anchored. To supernatural facts. Dogmas apparently are supernatural facts." He fingered the book for a moment. "I'd never considered dogmas except as matters of debate for scholars."

The monk smiled.

"You told me subjectivism could lead anywhere; I had to get down to facts. Why, because there's no anchorage?"

The monk nodded.

"Beginning again at the beginning means beginning from the facts?"

The monk agreed with another nod; he didn't want to interrupt. There was a long wait. St. Helier seemed to be thinking.

"If one starts from the facts, it's safe to assume one'll steer clear of — twisted notions, you called them?"

Thornton wasn't sure where all this was leading, or what it had to do with being a gardener. St. Helier had deliberately introduced the subject of dogmas on the top of it. Presumably—for the Contemplatives had come into it—his future was linked in his mind with his spiritual life. He replied tentatively:

"Well, the Incarnation and Redemption are facts, for a start. Do you know anything about them?"

"Very little," came frankly.

"And very little about the Crucifixion?"

"Except that a person, Christ, was crucified."

The monk saw an opening. The gardener business could wait.

"You've never related your experience in the woods that day with the Crucifixion?"

"With the Crucifixion?"

"What if I told you that it happened to the God Who gave you that experience?"

"But it couldn't!" he asseverated sharply. Too sharply.

"Well, it did. And you can't start from the facts if you deny them."

"I don't deny the Crucifixion. But, isn't it a matter of how one looks at it?"

"No, it's not a matter of looking at it. Christ crucified is either God or He's not God."

St. Helier was frowning.

"You've no objection to Christ being God?"

He reacted hastily:

"No, no. It's nothing like that." He picked up again the book the monk had lent him, turned over the pages and then read:

"The dogmas of Christianity are true not because we believe them, but because God gave them. To contradict them is to contradict God.' That sounds purely arbitrary."

"Not if they're true. And they are, if God gave them."

St. Helier closed the book.

"To whom?"

"Oh, a fisherman and a few others."

He didn't see it for a moment. When he did, it was to remark:

"It sounds preposterous."

"Choosing the lower orders? Yes, it's one of the preposterous things the Almighty would do. . . Look here, young Michael, what's the trouble?"

St. Helier put the book down on the table:

"Apparently one's not allowed to think for oneself." He dropped the slightly aggressive manner. "I don't know that I'm capable of simply accepting dogmas because I'm told they're true, and if I gave you a wrong impression just now, I'm sorry. They're necessary, I can see that; otherwise one gets nowhere. The Contemplatives found them necessary as far as I can make out. . . But, what on earth's the good of human reason if one can't use it?"

"Have you heard of theology?" the monk asked.

"Yes. The science of the revealed truths of God," came out pat. The monk laughed, and glanced at the book on the table. St. Helier had studied it fairly thoroughly.

"Very well. The use of human reason on the facts, dogmas, revealed truths—whatever you like to call them."

"Still, one has to accept them?"

"Certainly."

St. Helier hesitated.

"Supposing one found them impossible of acceptance?"

"One wouldn't if one used one's reason," the monk replied drily. "The Almighty wouldn't reveal what was impossible of acceptance."

St. Helier thought again.

"One can't accept anything blindly."

"One accepts intelligently, not blindly. And the Almighty does the rest."

"The rest?"

"Sees to it that Michael St. Helier is capable of accepting what he's told is true."

"Oh? . . . By a monk he meets on a boat?"

"By a monk who has been told it's true."

"By whom?"

"The Fisherman."

"That was two thousand years ago."

"The Fisherman's two thousand years old."

More thinking. St. Helier's eyes wandered to the book again. The monk watched him pick it up and consult it once more. From where he sat he could see passages underlined and notes written in the margin.

"Yes," came at length. "I think I could fill in the rest. . . What's grace?"

"That's where the Almighty comes in and enables Michael St. Helier to accept the dogmas to which he has been so studiously applying his reason already."

St. Helier took the hit with a smile.

Thornton decided to let it go at that, mentally noting that,

after sheering off from the Crucifixion, he had not returned to it. . .

"So you want to be a gardener?"

"Er —— oh, yes. Yes, we seem to have wandered away from that."

The monk saw the ship's bugle-boy pass the cabin-window and take up his position on deck.

"Look here, Padre ——"

St. Helier was interrupted by the opening notes of the dressing-call for dinner.

"Oh, damn it! We're always eating."

They waited until the bugle-boy had done his stuff.

"What's your objection to it, Padre?"

"I've no objection to your being a gardener. It's not my business to object. No, you banged it on me without any warning. I've not had time to get used to the idea."

"Of my doing real gardening—I mean professional gardening? I know I've only played about with it so far, but I know a lot, and I could easily become competent. And it will take me out of myself, which is what you want." He was suddenly almost pleading: "Padre, I'll have to do it. It's the one thing I could do and live the kind of life I *must* live. Because I'll never be happy unless I'm living near the things of God."

The kind of life he *must* live?

"You regard it as a sort of vocation?"

St. Helier didn't answer immediately. He was looking in front of him with that dreamy abstraction in his eyes.

"Vocation? I only know that I'm nearer to God amongst trees and flowers and everything in Nature, if that can be called a vocation. It meant everything to me, my garden at Chesters." There was a break in his voice. "I could do it for God, if I was a gardener, don't you understand?"

The monk understood perfectly. There would be a kind of sacredness in the work. Tending His creation. . . It would take him out of himself, as he said. Thornton studied him, wondering. And again his mind went back to Gabrielle St. Laurence. . . This eligible, cultured young man? With his

alarming good looks? The son of a Viscount? A considerable income of his own? . . .

"Michael, you're a young man of twenty. An idealist. If you'll forgive me saying it, mental stability has not been your strong point so far. You're rather beyond me at moments because you've sudden incursions of spiritual insight for which one's not prepared. All the same you've a dangerous aptitude for weird ideas. . . It seems to me you want to be a sort of hermit?"

St. Helier smiled:

"Gardener-hermit, if you like."

Thornton murmured "Um" meditatively. Viscount St. Helier? That impossible stepmother? The son for whom they had no use except to see married into the peerage, working as a gardener?

"You've looked at it from the social point of view?"

"Yes, I've thought of that."

"Sacrificing your own social status?"

"If it can be called sacrificing, after Chesters."

The monk buried his head in his hands. . . Common worldly sense said it was folly, madness — St. Helier was suiciding himself socially for a whim. . . It was not a whim though, any more than it was one of those hectic notions. There was nothing hectic about this. He just saw it as the obvious life for himself. . . Gabrielle St. Laurence? How on earth would she take it? There was that possibility. Or rather there had been. The possibility was beginning to appear remote and unsubstantial. Although — There would be no harm in sounding him:

"Michael, don't answer this if you'd rather not; but would it rule out the idea of marriage — this life? You may have no inclination for marriage now, but you might later. . . You'll succeed to the title one day, I suppose. And there's the question of carrying on the family. . . It's not my business, but it's occurred to me, that's all."

St. Helier found no difficulty:

"No, I've not ruled out marriage; my stepmother's rather put

me off females, though. I know there's the question of carrying on the family; but I'm not bound to marry because of that?"

"No, there's no obligation."

St. Helier smiled to himself:

"Besides, I doubt if any of the girls I know would want to marry a gardener."

Thornton said musingly:

"There're gentlemen-farmers of course. You could put 'Gentleman-gardener' on the gate."

"That's an idea."

The monk murmured:

"Oh, well . . ."

There was an interval. The monk remembered something and tried again:

"Oh, look here, you appalling young man, you left it to me to certify for the benefit of our Gabrielle that you were not a mental case."

St. Helier recognised at once to what he was referring, in spite of the irrelevance:

"I'm sorry, Padre. I rather hoped you would. It was your fault for wanting me to do it. I found I just couldn't. I can talk about myself to you, but I can't to anyone else. She probably thought me a complete lunatic." He shrugged as if dismissing it. "All the same, thanks."

It didn't bother him whether she thought him a complete lunatic or not. Thornton was not going to be stymied however:

"She's decided to treat you as a normal young man in future."

St. Helier's mind was elsewhere, already.

"Er, she's ——? Sorry, Padre."

"She's decided to treat you as a normal young man in future."

"Good. Yes, she might give that motherly stuff a rest."

"That's what I tried to hint. . . Still, you get on remarkably well together."

"Oh, she's a good sort. She ought to get married, though. More scope for motherliness."

Thornton could have groaned. St. Helier's mind was away again.

"Padre, if you were in my position, would you do it? Live that kind of life?"

"I should say you'll make an excellent hermit. I can't say more at present; it's only just been plumped on me. In any case, you're not starting to-morrow, unless you're applying for ship's gardener."

Thornton stood up, remarking it was about time to change. St. Helier roused himself.

"Yes. . . Dinner and mother St. Laurence."

## CHAPTER XIII

THEY were sitting at the same table in the garden-room, the monk noticed, at which he and Michael had sat on that first evening. The same attractive green shrub was still there in its tub, looking not quite so green after the tropical heat of the Pacific.

Robert Curtin had just passed by with an allusion to the "heavenly trio," two archangels and a monk, intended for their hearing. At a table in the glass shelter outside, Charles Withers and the little make-up man, Taylor, were playing cards. Thornton and St. Helier had left them after a Bridge Four and joined Gabrielle St. Laurence in here, whose friend had tactfully excused herself and disappeared. A film was showing in the Lounge and they had the garden-room more or less to themselves.

It was three days since St. Helier had informed him of the decision as to his future. They were nearing New Zealand. The monk himself would be there for two or three months before going on to Australia, Gabrielle St. Laurence for about the same time before returning to England. St. Helier, according to his original intention, was going straight on to Australia by the boat leaving from Wellington in the southern island. He had been asking questions about the Congress, however, which had made Thornton wonder; he could be tantalisingly vague on practical matters. At the moment apparently his one definite idea was the gardener career.

So far he could not have mentioned it to Gabrielle St. Laurence, for she would certainly have referred to it if he had. He had clearly implied that he would do so, and Thornton was seeing to it that he did, if only for the sake of her opinion.

He had in fact just decided that the psychological moment had arrived; at least he was going to make it the moment.

For ten minutes now the three of them had been talking about nothing in particular, and it looked like continuing . . .

"Our Michael has something to tell you."

Gabrielle St. Laurence looked up from the straw with which she was removing some foreign matter from a soft drink:

"Really?"

She regarded St. Helier expectantly. St. Helier however was looking at Thornton as though he wasn't quite sure what he meant.

"That thing we were discussing," Thornton prompted.

"Oh, that? . . . Well, it will keep, won't it? . . . I say, Padre, something's occurred to me."

Thornton suppressed his annoyance at the casualness of it, uncertain whether St. Helier was putting him off, or what.

"No —— you wouldn't want me hanging round," that young man was murmuring to himself.

"What do you want to say?"

"It's only occurred to me that there's no particular point in my going on to Australia straight away."

"What, stay in New Zealand for a bit?"

"Well, I could of course; but I wouldn't want to be in the way."

"Why should you be in the way?"

St. Helier smiled gratefully:

"That's very decent of you. . . You're sure?"

"Quite sure. We'll be delighted." Thornton put a slight stress on the "we." Gabrielle St. Laurence who had remained silent, remarked that she had never seen the point of Michael's rush to Australia.

"There's no rush," he answered. "I'd merely planned to go there. . . All right, then, Padre. That'll be great."

It was borne in upon Thornton that but for this change in his plans, Michael St. Helier and Gabrielle St. Laurence would shortly have said good-bye and gone on their ways in life. And good-bye to —— That possibly had been given an extension. . .

"Yes, that'll be topping."

"Er —— topping?"

"Being with you in New Zealand, Padre."

Thornton waited; he could almost sense Gabrielle waiting too.

"There's glorious scenery in the south, isn't there?"

"I believe so."

This was dreadful. He couldn't have forgotten that she would be in New Zealand? Thornton said deliberately:

"Hadn't you better tell Gabrielle about that other thing?"

"Oh, about ——"

He hesitated.

"I don't know. Would it interest her?"

"Well, of course it would. Tell her, man."

He reacted badly to it, refusing to be driven.

"If you don't mind, Padre, I'd rather not. I can't talk about myself to anybody."

It wasn't intended for rudeness, but it stung her out of herself and brought the colour flaming into her cheeks:

"Nobody asked you to talk about yourself to — anybody!"

It startled him, coming from Gabrielle.

"Sorry. I didn't mean you were anybody. I meant it was a private matter between the Padre and myself."

She retorted quickly:

"Nonsense. If it was, the Padre wouldn't want you to tell me. It's this asinine way you've got of hugging things to yourself."

It left him tongue-tied. She was worked up now:

"If you'd learned to open out, instead of behaving like a dumb person, it wouldn't have required the Padre to assure me you weren't a looney, the other day."

To St. Helier's credit he held himself in.

"I say, Gabrielle, isn't this rather beside the point?"

"No, it's not. Half the people on this boat think you're not all there — I mean that business on deck and then refusing to open your mouth. You're behaving like an idiot now, suddenly digging in your heels, 'I can't talk about myself' and that rot."

"There's no obligation to talk about myself."

She shifted impatiently.

"Oh, it's not a question of obligation. Can't you see how irritating it is when a person's asked to tell you something and he immediately gets into his shell. It's beastly rude for one thing."

"Not if it's a private matter."

"Private!" She turned to Thornton. "Is it?"

He could only reply:

"Michael, you certainly gave me to understand that you were going to talk it over with Gabrielle."

"Only because you wanted me to."

"Naturally I wanted you to. I wanted to know Gabrielle's opinion."

Michael went silent.

"Look here, Michael," she broke out, "you're simply splendid in most things. Isn't this rather absurd?"

He said abruptly, without looking up:

"Oh, all right, then. . . If you want to know, I'm going to be a gardener."

She looked as if she hadn't heard aright. She glanced at the monk and then back at St. Helier.

"You're going —— Did you say you were going to be a gardener?"

"A common or garden gardener."

She stared at him.

"Do you mean you're going to take up gardening as a profession?"

"I mean I'm going to take up gardening as a profession."

There was a wait.

"Is this what you didn't want to tell me?"

"It's what the Padre wanted me to tell you."

She studied the monk, as if for confirmation.

"A gentleman-gardener," the monk informed her.

"A sort of professional hobby?"

"A common or garden gardener," Michael repeated. He

was beginning to enjoy it now. There was an amused smile on his face as he watched her digesting it.

"This is not a joke?"

"No, it's not a joke. Any more questions?"

It struck the monk that she was reacting to it very much as he himself had, at first. Her look of incredulity was changing to bafflement.

"But, why in the name of all that's sane do you want to be a gardener?"

Michael shrugged. He dropped the bantering tone.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. . . Only —— Well, you're cultured for one thing. You'd be wasting yourself."

"It's not wasting oneself, gardening."

"No. But as a profession? Michael, you can't! Think of your people!"

"Do 'em good! They're only interested in marrying me into the peerage."

She looked slightly confused.

"Well, that's only natural."

Thornton wasn't sure how much she knew of the situation at Chesters, beyond what she had guessed. He remarked casually: "Your people hardly come into the question, do they?"

Michael took the hint and informed her uncomfortably: "I shan't be living at Chesters, when I get back."

It was news to her.

"Oh? . . . I see."

To the monk's surprise he blurted out:

"Things haven't been too happy there. We finished at loggerheads."

She showed genuine distress:

"I'm so sorry. It's as bad as that?"

"I'm afraid so."

There was an awkward pause.

"Michael, would you mind if I helped?" Thornton asked.

"No, I wish you would. I'm no good at this sort of thing."

He considered for a moment.

"Listen, Gabrielle."

She did so without interrupting, whilst the monk put the position as accurately as he could. It wasn't a matter of Michael earning his living by gardening, and it was quite unrelated to leaving Chesters. His whole heart was in gardening. It wasn't easy to convey the spiritual side. "You look upon it as a kind of vocation?" Michael nodded, his eyes on the green shrub. Thornton said nothing about the experience in the woods, but confined himself to Michael's intense love of nature. It wasn't just gardening as such; he felt he could express himself in gardening. "Do you mind this?" "No, go on, Padre." He tried to put the more intimate aspect — Michael's innate sense of the mystical, of the immanent life of the Creator in nature. . .

She listened, absorbed, glancing occasionally at the young man who, even if he couldn't tell her himself, had allowed the monk to do so for him. When the latter came to a halt, she said quite simply:

"Thank you, Padre."

She pondered for a minute.

"Michael, I'm sorry if I didn't understand; it sounded so impossible. You've never let me know much about yourself."

"You don't think it so impossible, now?" Michael asked it almost eagerly. She played with the straw in her glass.

"No. Not if you see it like that, spiritually. I don't fully understand and it still sounds strange, the idea of it. But it's not an idea with you; it's a conviction?"

Yes, it was a conviction, he assured her.

"Then I think you *ought* to do it — gardening, I mean."

The monk experienced a sense of immense relief. It was not just a concession to his unyielding attitude, but her deliberate decision in his favour.

"Thanks, Gabrielle," was Michael's answer. "I'm grateful for that."

Her opinion counted with him; after all? It was like the lifting of a barrier between them. There need never have been one but for her adopting the "motherly" attitude and his habit of "hugging things" to himself.

"It's a bit of a shock of course." She was smiling now. "Michael St. Helier, gardener."

To Thornton's amazement Michael was suddenly letting himself go: "Gabrielle, I *must* do it. And it'll have to be the real thing, not just playing about. I'd nothing really to do at Chesters except endure that ghastly life, and I got all sorts of twisted notions on things, the Padre calls them — from being shut up in myself. It's why that damnable thing happened on deck. . . . I've got to keep my mind off things. That's why I decided, partly; gardening *will* — the real thing. You see, don't you?"

It had come pouring out vehemently. He *wanted* her to understand now. His reaction to her sympathy? It came to Thornton that Gabrielle St. Laurence was the one other person beside himself to whom Michael had given his confidence.

She had leaned back and was looking away into the distance through the open doors of the garden-room, to where the lowering sun was glowing red over the Pacific.

"Yes, I see now," came at length. "Yes, I do think you ought to do it, if it's like that."

She looked away again. There was a long silence, in which she appeared to be considering. Thornton found himself waiting, though for what he didn't know. She turned and their eyes met. There was a question in hers, something she was asking herself. She looked at Michael, studying him for a moment, almost unaware of doing so. . . .

"What's the joke?" Michael asked, for she was smiling to herself.

"It's not a joke. Something's occurred to me, that's all."

"Well, go on."

"Don't 'hug' it to yourself," Thornton prodded.

"Very well." She was colouring. "Michael, I don't know

what you'll think of this, but —— It's flower-gardening you're keen on, isn't it?"

"I'm best at flower-gardening, yes."

"You've never seen Hollingham, but the flower-gardens are rather glorious. . . You'd not object, would you, to my cabling the pater from New Zealand ——"

She stopped, half afraid to go on.

"Cabling? Cabling what?"

"Well — 'Have found gardener. Writing. Gabrielle.'"

Michael stared at her.

"Just what does that mean?"

The crimson was flooding her cheeks. To cover her confusion — "It means," said Thornton, "that our Gabrielle is offering you a job. You now ask her what the salary is."

"But, do they want a gardener at Hollingham?" Michael asked.

"The flower-gardener went just before I left; he'd been pilfering, I believe."

"Michael, you won't pilfer?" Thornton warned him.

"But, they've someone else by now probably?"

"There was a man coming for a couple of months only; my father wants someone permanent."

Michael remained regarding her, then looked at Thornton, and back again at Gabrielle:

"That's a serious proposition? Flower-gardener at Hollingham?"

"Gentleman-flower-gardener," Thornton reminded.

"Quite serious," Gabrielle assured him. "If you care to consider it?"

Michael sat there doing so, smiling to himself.

"Well now, that's all settled," Thornton concluded the matter.

"Look here, Padre — steady on! . . . I say, Gabrielle, are you sure this is all right — your father and all that? I may not be good enough. There's a lot I'll have to mug up."

"I'd not have asked you if I wasn't quite sure it will be all right."

Michael lit a cigarette, and inhaled rapidly. The proposition appealed to him unquestionably. As far as Thornton could judge, it appealed very much.

"Well, Gabrielle, that's very decent of you... All right, then... Wait a minute... A couple of months?... Well, there's no need for me to go to Australia ——"

"I was just wondering about Australia," she said.

"No, there's no need at all. I was only going there because it's the sort of place one goes to."

"Quite," Thornton contributed. "Siberia, California, Bulgaria, any old where—all sorts of places one goes to. Nothing in it."

Michael grinned. He made his decision:

"All right, Gabrielle, that's fixed. I'll take it on."

He stretched out his hand. Gabrielle took it, and they gripped.

"I'd better come back with you from New Zealand, then?"

"That would seem to be the obvious thing," she agreed.

There was a pause. They looked at Thornton to find him grinning to himself.

"What's funny?" Michael asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

He went on grinning, however. Gabrielle with her cheeks flaming, got up, went round the table and shook him by the shoulders:

"Padre, will you stop it! You're appalling... Finish your drink!"

He did so obediently. She returned to her place.

"The obvious thing, of course."

"Padre!"

"I'm only agreeing with you."

He beamed upon the pair of them:

"Well now, who'd have thought it!"

Three days later, in the early morning, the liner was entering Auckland Harbour.

Thornton, his things packed, was seeking out friends and saying good-byes. Dr. and Mrs. Judd, also Robert Curtin, were all three of them making for Wellington in the southern island, and from there on by the boat to Australia; Robert Curtin, after business in Sydney, returning to Canada. "Thanks for that family gathering," he said to the Judds; "the future is now pregnant with possibilities," and left them guessing; and to Robert Curtin, "May Canada rock to your name, and heaven help them if you're made Minister of Propaganda!" "I guess my little bit of propaganda on board didn't work out so bad," the Canadian returned, "except for you doin' that tough stuff. Wal, Padre, you given us all the uplift ——" Thornton said good-bye hurriedly.

Charles Withers he found in his cabin. The film comedian pulled an envelope from his pocket. "That's my Hollywood address, Padre, and I'm showin' you round when you're there." They gripped. "I'm a better man for meetin' you, and Charles Withers ent goin' to forget the Padre as picked up that glass off the floor."

## CHAPTER XIV

IT WAS an inspiring spectacle.

Over the harbour airplanes were circling and dipping in salute to the Australian boat, their wings flashing in the sun above the dazzle of the sea. From where they stood off the main road they were looking down on another sea, of heads; all Auckland seemed to be out. There was a group of figures, isolated from the crowd, on the quay-side, in waiting to receive the Apostolic Delegate and the members of the Australian Hierarchy who were accompanying him to New Zealand for the Congress.

A colourful scene. Flags and bunting waving in a light breeze, the blue of heaven above, the yet bluer surface below, the boat gliding majestically into dock.

The monk glanced sideways at Michael watching it all intently, and remarked:

"You're letting yourself in for a terrible lot of Popery."

Michael smiled. His eye was on the group on board standing apart near the taffrail with passengers crowded behind them:

"The Higher Orders?"

Gabrielle turned from her absorption in the scene.

"Hierarchy," she suggested.

"Yes, mother," Michael returned.

The monk said he would have to leave them, he was supposed to be on the quay for the reception. He went off. They saw his big figure manoeuvring through the crowd, gain the gangway that was being kept for the illustrious visitors from Australia, and finally join the waiting group below.

Michael pulled a dilapidated "Programme of the Congress" from his pocket, smoothed it out, and turned over the pages. Gabrielle found herself confronted with "Speakers and Subjects," and a finger indicating in the list, "You and Thousands

Like You" above the name, "Rev. Anselm Thornton." He asked her:

"What's that about?"

"I'm not quite sure, but I believe it's about war."

"War? . . . Oh?"

Michael went silent.

"Why are you frowning?" she asked.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said lamely. "Only we had a hell of an unpleasant disagreement about war."

"Really? What happened?"

He admitted frankly:

"If you want to know, I lost my temper and left him."

She remembered now, the monk had mentioned something about it. She took the Programme from him and consulted it.

"That one's in the Town Hall. Are you coming?"

"Why, ought one?"

"There's no ought about it."

"I don't know that sort of thing's in my line — listening to addresses."

It wasn't meant to sound superior, but it irritated her.

"Haven't you the intelligence to listen to people who know what they're talking about? The Padre went through the war before you were in your cradle."

Michael looked somewhat abashed. He replied meekly:

"Yes, mother. I'll come."

She kicked his shin.

There was an outburst of cheering down below. The liner was now alongside the Quay, her mooring cables being drawn in and slowly tautening. After a delay they saw the gangway being lowered. A fresh outburst, now tumultuous, greeted the Apostolic Delegate and his companions of the Australian Hierarchy descending one by one. The Bishop of Auckland moved forward from the group in waiting on the Quay.

The Congress had begun.

They were strenuous days for the monk, and he saw Michael and Gabrielle only at intervals.

The former was comfortably ensconced in one of the Auckland hotels. Gabrielle was staying with a large Catholic family of New Zealand cousins whom she had never before seen in her life, who owned a large estate on the coast, and for whom existence constituted one perpetual *joie de vivre*. The Hargreaves, with their five girls and three boys in their *teens* and *twenties*, ran farming on a large scale, the boys working under their father, the girls on endless jobs from milking to shinning up fruit-trees. Meals, for which Mrs. Hargreaves was ceaselessly collecting her family with a great clanging bell, were at any old time. In between work there was bathing, surf-riding, speed-boating, and whizzing by car into Auckland for shopping. They were all healthy, with prodigious appetites, muscular and tanned. The house, built on to in all directions, was a complex maze inside which Gabrielle had at first wandered about bewilderedly for her room.

She had found it all rather overwhelming for a day or two, after the dignity and quiet of Hollingham — this youth of the young new world with their laughter and ragging and untamed spirits, her own ingrained sense of ordered life and the refinement of an old English family.

It was the monk and Michael, strangely enough, who unwittingly had helped her to tune in. The Hargreaves, on hearing about them, had without warning the following morning dispatched a car with a couple of the girls, who had collected the monk from Bishop's House and Michael from his hotel, refusing to listen to excuses, and landed them back at the house all within an hour. The pair of them had stood dazed in the hall surrounded by triumphant young things explaining that "kidnapping" was a family habit, with the bell clanging deafeningly for lunch, at which meal they were informed they would stay the night, that thirteen horses were being groomed and saddled for the afternoon, that work was going to Hades during the Congress, that the entire family were attending every public meeting, and making their Communions every morning. . .

Thornton had expressed a doubt as to whether he and Mi-

chael could ride thirteen horses, also his admiration of their Catholic spirit. Mrs. Hargreaves had told Michael he had wonderful eyes, and five young ladies had burst out that it was what they had noticed themselves. Michael had frowned for a moment, and then laughed and retorted, "Not interested." Five pairs of eyebrows had lifted simultaneously, five pairs of eyes consulted, and then levelled an expressive so-that's-it upon Gabrielle and Michael; the latter had asked if it was a staged act and been informed that it was an ocular performance reserved for appropriate occasions.

A cavalcade of thirteen had trotted, cantered and galloped in crocodile formation round the miles of estate in the afternoon, farm-hands pausing in their work and cows in their chewing to gape—the monk and Michael on enormous chestnuts, Gabrielle on a refined little bay, all three in borrowed riding-clothes; ducks, chickens and sheep scattering before the advance, Mr. Hargreaves in the van shouting what was what and what was not, alternately pointing with a long whip and cracking it to keep up the pace.

On their return Michael had asked to see the gardens, and gone off with Mr. Hargreaves, who ten minutes later, had found himself standing before his own choice rose-bed, listening to the young man he was showing round reeling off names he had never heard, and scratching his head in bewilderment.

After tea the guests, in oilskins, had been packed into the speed-boat with the family and a warning to invoke their guardian angels . . . By some miracle they had returned to shore alive. Thornton, dripping with sea-water, had asked, "Anything more?" and been told that things didn't really get going until after supper.

That meal over, a charade melodrama was announced and duly performed, the scenario of which the guests had been given ten minutes to peruse, with Michael and Gabrielle, under protest, cast for hero and heroine, the one in a yellow moustache, the other a golden wig, the domestic staff for audience, Thornton doing soft music on the piano at moments he deemed appropriate.

Next, the bell had clanged deafeningly once more, a gang of farm-hands trooped in, and the whole lot shot down on their knees for Rosary and Night-prayers.

Home-brewed beer.

Bed.

The monk and Michael had been whizzed back to Auckland next morning. Before leaving, Gabrielle had secured a minute with them alone and produced a reply-cable from her father which ran: "Your gardener accepted stop who is he." Michael's face had lighted: "You told him that in the letter?" She had done so. The gardener-to-be had grinned: "Looks like he's getting what's coming to him." They had agreed that the matter must be kept from the Hargreaves; it would merely invite unmerciful ragging.

Those packed days of the Congress were for Michael his first experience of religion as a corporate affair. The monk had little opportunity, at the time, for assessing its effects upon a young man to whom the facts of religion had until recently meant nothing, and whose spiritual life, based on a personal experience, was as yet unrelated to Christian dogma. They had talked about the "facts" on that one occasion. Michael had read carefully and closely the doctrinal book he had been lent.

After that — silence.

His mental activity apparently ran in periods of silence punctuated by requests for a "talk." Thornton had learned the wisdom of waiting.

He asked him no questions when they bumped into one another at the crowded Congress Receptions and garden-parties, the social occasions for meeting the Prelates, but noticed that he seemed quite at-home. The monk introduced him, sometimes in company with Gabrielle, to various Archbishops and Bishops, many of whom knew of the old Catholic family of St. Laurence. They had probably heard of Viscount St. Helier,

though they refrained from mentioning it to his son, who, out of courtesy, kissed their rings with well-bred ease.

Michael himself, true to form, said nothing, but from Gabrielle the monk learned that her protégé was attending the public meetings; she was seeing to that herself. He was also present, it appeared, at some of the Solemn Masses, and at night at the great flood-lit Rallies in the Stadium which the monk found so immensely inspiring.

In the Stadium, on the first Wednesday night, the monk gave his first public address. He was glad, as he went to the microphone and looked down on the sea of faces, that somewhere in that vast arena Michael would be listening. Ten thousand men of the Holy Name Society, lined rank upon rank across the expanse, were completing the renewal of their Promises, candles raised to the star-lit heavens, long beams of searchlight revealing the tiers of humanity behind them, and, beyond, the woods in whose midst the Stadium lay. Behind him the Hierarchies of New Zealand and Australia occupied the built-up platform from whose altar Benediction would be given after the address.

The monk spoke on "Christ, Our God and Our King" to that battalion of "God's Army" below:

"I saw you last twenty years ago in another Army, towards the end of the Great War in Europe. Our English Batteries were on the Somme, the Batteries of New Zealand on our right. We are together again after all these years, in a greater war—for the Faith. As you volunteered then for the Allied cause, so will you volunteer now for the cause of Christ Who is your God and your King. As Catholics you are enrolled in an Army far greater than any army of this world—the deathless Army of God, at war to bring back the world to morality, sanity, and the Peace that Christ, Who is God, can alone give. . . ."

He spoke on those three points in turn—the Grace of Christ enabling man to conquer fallen nature, his inability to rise to the supernatural whilst drugged with the lusts of the flesh; the vanishing glory of the vaunted kingdom of man, the im-

perishable glory of the Kingdom of God, the obedience to the laws of Christ by which alone justice and charity on earth and the eternal happiness of heaven could be attained; the futile endeavours of the world's leaders for peace whilst the laws made by God were ignored — twenty years of abortive European conferences from which the very name of God had been excluded; the nations crying Peace when there was no peace, and never would be, without the God in Whose hands lay the whole world, its peoples, its present and its future. . .

The monk ended:

"This Congress is a clarion call to you of the Faith in New Zealand. You value your Faith. The Congress bears witness to it, the immense number of Communions being made. As Catholics you are a Royal people of the Royal Family of the King of Kings. As Catholics you are in possession of something compared with which all the things of this world fade out into petty insignificance. Live your Faith to the full, go forth from this Congress in all the strength of your Catholic life, and show the world — that Christ is your God and your King!"

The monk ran into Gabrielle the following morning coming out of the Cathedral in company with some of the Hargreaves. She drew him aside: "Michael was there last night, Padre, and I think something went home. He said he supposed they took their Faith for granted, those men, and he envied them."

There was a native Maori concert in the Auckland Town Hall that evening, at which Thornton secured a seat next to Michael and Gabrielle. The concert, which opened with thunders of stamping, spear-thrusting and other alarming posturings, was a marvel of vibrant singing accompanied by guitars and the Poi — a tiny wrist-drum for beating the time. As the Maori singers warmed up it became a crescendo of vocal power, the native in them showing in their excitement. There was a riotous finale of Victorian melodies, an inheritance from their first contact with the English, and, by the applause, immensely popular with the New Zealanders. The whole stage-

full of them, when it was over, knelt for the episcopal blessing. Michael turned an astonished face to the monk:

"But, are they Catholics?"

"Mostly, I believe. Why not?"

Michael didn't know why not, except that they had been cannibals comparatively recently. Thornton was assuring him that ex-cannibals made excellent Catholics, when a New Zealand priest next him, who had overheard, offered to present them to a Maori chief. They waited until the gangway was clear of the throng before being piloted to a personage holding a small reception below the stage.

The three of them were presented with due formality, the chief with his bare chest and arms, bowing low, and then regarding them steadily in his open Maori way, the dark eyes taking them in one by one. He asked in excellent English:

"You like the songs?"

They did, very much, the monk assured him. The Maori chief returned the compliment:

"And I like the preaching last night. It is you who preach?"

The monk said it was and thanked him. The Maori's gaze returned to Michael and Gabrielle.

"The English are beautiful. You are English?"

They stammered in embarrassment that they were.

"You are Catholics, like I am?"

The monk told him that Miss St. Laurence was a Catholic. Michael found himself subjected to the calm gaze:

"You? No?"

He replied apologetically:

"Well, I'm afraid not."

The New Zealand priest whispered something *sotto voce* to the Maori, who suddenly smiled:

"But, you are good, like me. I am good Catholic." There was a twinkle in the dark eyes. "I not eat people on Friday. No flesh-meat."

It happened on the Saturday.

The thing that Thornton had never disguised from himself

might happen again, as it had happened on the boat that fatal night. They had barely referred to it since that day of Michael's unburdening of his soul, and his own endeavour to rationalise the inordinate fear in face of horrors. The visible result had been a Michael resolute to break from that sealed-up life of his own, and who had gone out of his way to be sociable. His mental outlook had become altogether healthier. Thornton was fully aware, however, that, given the panic conditions, Michael so far had no powerful spiritual convictions of the kind to overcome that nightmare dread.

It happened on the Saturday night, when all Auckland crowded the Stadium for the Pageant play, *Credo*, a drama of the unending war between God and Lucifer, superbly staged with some thousand players in the cast.

The monk, in one of the tiers reserved for priests, knew that somewhere in the seats below Michael and Gabrielle were watching the splendour of that spectacle beneath the southern stars. It never even occurred to him in his absorption what the effect of it upon Michael would be—that terribly realistic presentation of the hideous triumph of sin—the flood-lit phalanxes of the Angels of God fading out before the darkness of evil, the hosts of Lucifer in possession, the reign of hatred and violence, until the world that God had made good seemed lost beyond all redemption. . .

Not until then did the searchlights sweep from the stage for the most poignant moment of the drama, to the Penitents shouldering great crosses, bent painfully beneath the weight, moving slowly in single file. . . Only when they entered the arena did the meaning of it become apparent—the chosen Victims offering their lives in expiation. They came on slowly, unwavering, the blue dome of heaven above, the hush of suspense around, the hordes of Lucifer in waiting, steadfast before the nearness of their agony. . . In the sudden all-enveloping darkness the clash of heaven and hell came hideously in the night, the unleashed powers of darkness wreaking their satanic malice. . . the sounds of it dying out into silence. . . Then the blackness giving way slowly to the dawn, light creeping

imperceptibly to where the hordes of Lucifer had been, showing in dim outline the thing that had been done, until in a blaze of glory the long line of crosses stood there, and upon them, hanging twistedly, the Victims . . . crucified for love of Him Who too had been crucified. . .

The monk found himself blinking away the tears.

The pathos of that ghastly realism!

The drama continued to unfold, the angels returning to the arena, groups of the faithful appearing, coalescing, unifying into one great multitude of the redeemed, to rebuild where Lucifer had destroyed . . . on the site of the crucifixions a church rising, stone by stone, to the songs of the choirs of God, the golden-lit altar upon which the Sacrifice of Calvary would be offered, inspiring other Victims down the ages, who too would offer their all for the unending Victory of the Faith. . .

The monk stirred.

He recollected himself and came back to earth; a young priest on his right was remarking that it had been too realistic.

"What, the crucifixions?"

He considered for a moment.

"No. It had to be realistic, or it wouldn't have rung true."

The priest objected:

"Before all this crowd? Half-stripped?"

"There was a crowd on Calvary. Our Lord was stripped. The Crucifixion was appallingly realistic."

The priest murmured something about it needing a lot of softening down. They were plainly not going to agree.

And then he remembered Michael.

He wondered uneasily.

It had been vivid enough in all conscience.

It took him some time making his way through the throng and round the arena to the car that was taking him back. When eventually he found it, the Bishop and a priest who

were returning with him were already inside and waiting. The Bishop pointed to a car nearby and remarked on young ladies who pursued popular preachers. Thornton apologised for keeping him and went across. The car was the Hargreaves' and the young lady was Gabrielle St. Laurence. There was no Michael with her. She drew him away out of earshot:

"I'm terribly sorry, Father, but something's happened."

"Tell me."

"Michael left in the middle of it; directly he saw those crucifixions."

"Oh? . . . What, he didn't like it?"

Her mouth was quivering, he noticed.

"I don't know what it was. He was horrified, I think. He got up at once and went straight off. I don't think he quite knew what he was doing, because he stumbled over a man's legs without even apologising."

Thornton said, "Um. . . Did many people notice?"

"Some of them must have."

He considered for a moment.

"He's gone back to his hotel, as far as you know?"

She supposed that was what he had done; he wasn't here, and he knew the Hargreaves were driving him back.

"What shall I tell them?"

"Say he's probably walking back."

She asked anxiously:

"It's the same thing that happened that night on board?"

"I'm afraid it looks rather like it."

Thornton told her not to worry, for she was barely concealing her distress. He made a hasty decision:

"I'll see if I can find him at the hotel."

She looked relieved.

"Of course, it was pretty gruesome, that scene."

"Oh, Father, it was unspeakably glorious! How could he take it like that!"

"He probably wouldn't, if he knew anything about Calvary. . . Now, I'm keeping a Bishop waiting."

Half an hour later, Thornton, in the vestibule of the Queen's Hotel, was consulting the young lady at the office. Michael's room-key was hanging on its peg; he had not yet collected it, and so presumably had not yet returned. Thornton decided to wait.

He was recognised by a party who asked him to join them for a drink. It gave him the excuse he wanted, so he sat down with them and kept an eye on the main entrance.

He was still keeping an eye on it, when, after some twenty minutes, Michael suddenly appeared. He went straight to the office without looking about him, collected his key, entered the lift, and went up.

Thornton waited a minute, and then made his excuses. He found Michael's door on the third floor, and tapped. There was a wait before he heard a movement inside, and the door opened.

Michael stood there without speaking. His face was flushed and he looked dishevelled.

"Do you mind my coming in? I'll not keep you a minute."

Michael moved back into the room and Thornton followed. He noticed the other's clothes. It was evidently raining outside. His shoes were muddy and looked as if he had been walking for miles.

"Hadn't you better change that coat?"

Michael took it off mechanically and dropped it on a chair. He went to a cupboard, took another from a hanger, put it on and then sat down, his head hanging. Thornton planted himself on the edge of a table.

"Gabrielle told me about it."

Michael looked up. There was misery in his eyes, and then a sudden angry blaze. He almost shouted:

"That bl—— butchery! Why in hell did they show a thing like that!"

Thornton knew it would be futile to argue. It had been futile before, on the boat. He had had to wait then and he would have to wait now.

"You've been tramping all the way back, of course, with your mind working on it. Well, you're going to stop that! See!"

He said it sharply and deliberately to divert the other's attention from himself. It was successful.

"What the devil ——"

Michael cut himself off.

"I'm sorry, Padre."

Thornton picked up a gaudy-looking book that had caught his eye, and examined it.

"'Mystery Thriller'? Where did you get this?"

Michael stared at him.

"What that's got —— The Hargreaves gave it me to read."

Thornton put it down and stood up. He laid his hands on Michael's shoulders:

"Michael, I'm coming round to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, get this into your head. It's not as bad as last time, anywhere near. You're not hysterical. You're frightened and you're angry with yourself. I'm going to tell them to bring you up a drink. You'll drink it, and you'll read that trash." He indicated the "Mystery Thriller." "And then you'll get into bed and go to sleep. Have you got that clear?"

Michael muttered:

"I'll try."

"No, you won't try. You'll do it."

"All right, Padre."

Thornton moved towards the door.

"And stop looking at the floor!"

Michael's head came up.

"Good night."

"I say, Padre, I'm sorry. It's awfully decent ——"

The door closed.

In the little chapel at Bishop's House, the monk knelt with his eyes on the Crucifix above the altar. He knelt for fifteen minutes, and, when he rose from his knees, he knew what he would have to say to Michael St. Helier.

It was a far calmer young man whom the monk found waiting for him in his room at eleven a.m. on that Sunday morning. There was a strained look in his eyes, but otherwise he appeared to be his normal self. No, it had been nowhere near as bad as last time. A book lay open on the table, the one Thornton had lent him on board.

Michael suggested: "What about the roof-garden?"

They went up there. Thornton stood surveying the panorama of Auckland City spread beneath them, stretching away to the harbour, and beyond it the Pacific glittering in the morning sun. An ocean liner was visible on the horizon.

Michael opened out a couple of deck-chairs and they sat down. There was going to be no emotionalism this time, Thornton had already sensed. Michael was collected and unhurried, lighting a cigarette with a steady hand. He took the initiative by stating something that had no apparent bearing on last night:

"I went to one of the early Masses this morning; and I went three or four times last week." He inhaled, with his eyes on the stone balustrade in front. "I've been reading the part about the Mass in that book of yours. Apparently, it's the centre of everything—in your religion, I mean. Every Mass is a 'representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross.' Is that right?"

"Absolutely," Thornton replied.

"So that to believe in the Mass, one has to believe in the Crucifixion?"

"Yes."

"And that means believing that Christ is God? In the way that you believe that Christ is God Himself? I just want to get this clear."

"Quite. It means that, yes."

Michael paused. Thornton waited, wondering where this was leading. There was a definiteness about him that was new.

"I told you last time that I knew very little about Christ, except that He was someone who was crucified. I rather

sheered off from that when you tried to pin me down."

"You did."

He was certainly being candid.

"Padre, it's terribly difficult to believe that it was God on the Cross."

Thornton watched him for a moment; he wasn't sure what "terribly difficult" meant.

"You'd not find it difficult to believe that it was God in the manger of Bethlehem?"

"No, I don't think so. There's something beautiful about Bethlehem."

But not about the Cross?

"Michael, this is where you sheered off last time."

"I know. But I'll not do so now."

Much better. Thornton decided to go straight ahead:

"Very well. You don't like associating God with the Cross? That's your real trouble?"

Michael broke out:

"With blood and agony and death — a hideous thing like crucifixion? The sort of thing they showed last night?"

Thornton studied him.

"Can you talk about last night? If you can, it will be better than bottling it up."

Michael sat back wearily, the strain showing in his eyes again.

"I'd sooner try and forget. I made a bl — fool of myself, and talking about it won't alter the fact. You tried reasoning it out last time, but it's happened again. I wish to hell it hadn't, but it has."

Thornton said gently:

"Listen, Michael. It's happened, I know; but you've not gone all to bits this time, and you're behaving reasonably. I only want to know one thing."

"What's that?"

"Did that scene make no appeal to you whatever? Beyond the horror of it, I mean."

It brought a shade of fear into his eyes. He swallowed. Thornton watched him; he was trying to suppress what his imagination was conjuring up.

"I've a reason for asking that," Thornton insisted.

"All right. Yes, the way they came steadily on, unflinching, knowing what was coming . . . that was magnificent. If they could only have left it at that. Just the darkness descending."

"I see. . . And because they didn't leave it at that, but showed the butchery, everything cancelled out for you, except the horror?"

Michael considered. He was calm again.

"I'd say that puts it accurately, yes."

"Very well, forget about last night now."

Thornton stood up, then went in a leisurely way and leaned against the stone balustrade, seemingly to study the view. A surprised voice came:

"But —— that's not all? I thought —— "

Thornton turned:

"No, it's not all. But it's up to you now, Michael."

For a moment the other didn't understand. Then he began to colour.

"You see, you've virtually told me that Calvary fails to appeal to you, since the Almighty has not chosen to eliminate the horror of it."

Michael remained silent.

"Michael, you're too scrupulously sincere to deny a thing merely because the idea of it is repugnant to yourself."

He shifted restlessly. Thornton could almost read the working of his mind, the reluctance to depart from his own conception of God. He was still clinging to that notion of the Creator aloof from everything ugly and hideous, his conviction from that experience in the woods long ago. Eternal Beauty, hanging on a Cross, nailed, twisted, disfigured, at the mercy of all that was loathsome. . .

"You said it was terribly difficult to believe that it was God on the Cross. You mean of course that it's in violent conflict with your own conception of God. You could accept Bethle-

hem, but you can't accept Calvary. They're both historical facts, Michael. If it was *not* God on the Cross, the Infant of Bethlehem was not God. Christ was not God. The Christian revelation is not from God. Christian dogmas are human inventions. All the millions of Christians for two thousand years have been deceived by lies. This Congress is a congress of dupes."

"That's not fair!" he exclaimed.

"I'm taking you at your word, and that's the plain logic of it. If Christ, Who died on the Cross, is *not* God, the whole of Christianity goes. You can't pick and choose what you like; you can take it or leave it."

It had struck home, and he knew it. The monk took out his pipe and began filling it, alert to the quandary in which the other was placed. He wanted desperately to accept — to accept everything, the Faith and all it implied; he had asked those very definite questions. It was there the whole time, driving him on. So was the Cross, confronting him at every turn. . . Thornton saw it coming, the other's lips quivering, his face going white:

"Oh, my God, I wish I'd never —— Why the hell's it got to be like that!"

He sprang up and began pacing about. Thornton remained leaning against the balustrade. He put the unlit pipe back in his pocket. There was nothing for it but to wait. It was a full minute before the other came to a standstill, muttering that he was sorry. Thornton said quietly:

"Michael, the Crucifixion's the most terrible thing that has ever happened, and nothing can change that. You can deny it was God hanging there, but that's the coward's way — afraid to face the implications. You're not a coward, and you're not afraid of the implications; you detest the horror of it. . . Now, get this. It's not what you feel about it; it's what God *did* — *your* God of Eternal Beauty. And millions have loved Him for it, just because it was God Who did it and endured what was so unutterably repugnant to Himself. The Crucifixion is the one hideous thing in the world, Michael, that is sublimely

beautiful as well. Can you appreciate the meaning of, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'?"

"Who said that?"

"The Crucified, Who laid down His life and proved it."

Michael remained very still.

There was a long silence.

The monk glanced at him, and then looked away.

He had seen the tears.

And the dawn of a great understanding.

## CHAPTER XV

ON THE same Sunday, in the evening, Thornton and Michael were collected by a detachment of Hargreaves and driven out to the coast for supper.

Gabrielle, who had accompanied them into Auckland for Benediction, had secured five minutes alone with the monk at Bishop's House. He had been able to reassure her about Michael; last night had brought things to a head — Michael, he believed, was going to face the question of something more definite than his own inadequate religion. It had left her wondering, but considerably relieved. Michael himself had managed to blurt out to her, "I'm sorry that happened last night. Could you try and forget it?"

At the Hargreaves, that young man, his normal composed self again, apologised, not altogether successfully, for failing to turn up at the car-park the previous evening. The excuse of walking back for the sake of exercise failed to convince the five girls in particular. He was informed that either he was too refined to associate with farm-hands, or there had been a lovers' quarrel. Michael took it without turning a hair:

"Wrong on both counts. The soil is my natural element, and it requires lovers for a lovers' quarrel."

The great bell mercifully intervened.

Michael, however, was not going to be let off. At supper, after a rambling discussion of the Pageant play by everybody all together, five determined young ladies on either side of him deliberately returned to it. Michael was told flatly that he was altogether too mysterious about himself. He retorted that all great souls were shrouded in mystery. Thornton noticed that he was rather enjoying this innocent inquisitiveness; probably because it was so different from the usual feminine interest in himself.

"Gabrielle's mysterious too," the youngest affirmed. Ga-

brielle looked up hastily from the salad on which she was engaged. "Yes, you are. You're both mysterious." There was a chorus of agreement. Gabrielle was accused of smiling enigmatically whenever she was asked what Michael did, or why he was here with her in New Zealand; Michael of saying nothing about himself, or why he had come all the way to New Zealand for the Congress, if he wasn't a Catholic. Michael laid down his knife and fork:

"The trouble with you kids," he told them, "is that you're slobberry with romance. Gabrielle's regard for myself, likewise my regard for Gabrielle, is for the intellectual and spiritual qualities we observe in each other. Our admitted physical beauty, however overwhelming to movie-minded schoolgirls, is a matter of indifference to both of us. To put it concisely — you're all of you yapping up the wrong tree."

Five pairs of eyes consulted. Thornton caught sight of Gabrielle colouring; Michael really needn't have put it quite so baldly. The eldest girl returned with:

"And to put it concisely — that's bunk."

Michael bowed:

"Rather, shall we say — it's incomprehensible to the mentality that gloats upon glamour."

"Rot! People aren't mysterious about themselves unless they're hiding something."

Michael replied, "Keep it under your hats — I'm a Russian spy, Gabrielle's the greatest living vamp —"

A tea-cosy suddenly enveloped his head. Michael removed it leisurely:

"When, Gabrielle, you return to your ancestral home, kindly include this hooliganism in the account of your New Zealand cousins."

"Cousin Gabrielle's invited us to Hollingham," the youngest announced. Michael grinned, "Safe invitation. Fifteen thousand miles away."

She returned unabashed:

"Well, has Gabrielle invited you?"

It caught Michael unprepared. He hesitated, with heighten-

ing colour, searching desperately for a way of escape; the Hargreaves were to know nothing about the gardener-business. He caught Gabrielle's confused look and the note of warning in her eyes. Fingers were thrusting at him right and left, challenging him to deny that he'd been invited; why was he going to Hollingham? Of course there was something behind it. Michael succeeded in regaining his poise:

"There happens to be a famous Beech Avenue at Hollingham; naturally I am anxious to see it."

It was greeted with uproarious laughter.

"What's the joke? Trees are in my line."

There was a note of seriousness in his tone.

Mr. Hargreaves, who, at the end of the long table, had been listening with a smile of amusement on his face, remarked to his daughters:

"If you kids chattered less, you'd find out what your young man does with his time."

It arrested their attention abruptly. The youngest demanded whether he knew himself.

"I reckon I could put you wise, because he told me more about my own flowers than I knew myself, and I've been running the garden for twenty years."

Michael's head had turned quickly:

"I say, I'm sorry. It's an objectionable habit I've got."

"You're mistaking my meaning, young man. I didn't find it objectionable; I was mighty interested."

"He's a botanist!" from the youngest. The eyes consulted again, doubtfully. Botanist? No, dull. Noses wrinkled in distaste.

"He's a gardener!" the youngest again. She was told not to be absurd, he was a Viscount's son. Michael glanced uncomfortably at Gabrielle who was looking down. Mr. Hargreaves eyed his family:

"Maybe. But I'd offer him a salary to do the gardening here. He's done plenty of it." He challenged Michael to deny it.

"Oh yes, I've done a good deal. Why not?"

"You're not a *real* gardener?" — that dreadful youngest once more.

It roused Michael. He shot back, oblivious as to where it might lead:

"Why shouldn't I be a *real* gardener?"

"All right, then, you be *our* gardener. Father means it."

There was a riotous clapping of hands. Thornton, who had been listening between snatches of conversation with Mrs. Hargreaves, saw danger looming ahead.

"It's very kind of your father," Michael replied politely, "I'm afraid he'd be disappointed though. In any case, I'm getting back to England."

"I know," came triumphantly. "He's going to be Gabrielle's gardener."

Thornton plunged in quickly:

"I say, that's an idea! What about it, Gabrielle?"

There was a momentary pause before she recovered from her confusion and cottoned on. She appeared to ponder.

"That's certainly an idea. What about it, Michael?"

"Righto!" Michael played up cheerfully. "That's fixed. Gardener at Hollingham."

Ribald jeers.

"You two," said the eldest, "are a disgustingly unsatisfactory pair."

"We're not a pair," Michael returned. "The trouble with you kids is that you don't believe a word we say."

## CHAPTER XVI

YOU, and Thousands Like You."

It was an intriguing title, and drew an immense crowd to the Auckland Town Hall on that second Tuesday of the Congress. Loudspeakers outside and a warm night saved the situation for those unable to gain entry. The Press had announced that the monk would be speaking on war, and intimated that the subject would be timely, seeing that uneasiness over events in Europe were spreading.

The monk, waiting behind the scenes, found his mind reverting to that evening on board ship when Michael had turned him down for something he had said about war. By a tacit understanding they had avoided the subject ever since. He wondered how Michael would take what he was going to say this evening.

That young man, sitting with Gabrielle in the centre of the hall with a long line of Hargreaves two rows behind them, remarked to her *sotto voce*:

"I suppose we are rather asses, always sitting together."

She replied with studied indifference:

"I agree, it's a stupid habit; but you were not a success sitting alone."

"Sitting alone?"

"I rescued you from your idiotic isolation on board."

"So you did. Yes, mother, I am not unmindful of your solicitude."

"You'll have to call me 'ma'am' at Hollingham."

"Yes, ma'am."

Michael grinned to himself.

"I say, Gabrielle, did they spot it? The Hargreaves?"

She answered boldly:

"No. They decided in the end that we were completely disinterested."

"Well, aren't we?"

An ovation from the audience interrupted them. The monk and the Bishop, who was acting as chairman, were taking their places on the platform.

The Bishop wasted no time. He reminded the audience that many of them had already heard Father Anselm Thornton in the Cathedral and the Stadium the previous week, and the immense numbers present this evening were a tribute to his popularity. Father Thornton was a monk whose superiors released him for the work of public speaking, not on the ground that he was an orator, but a speaker with an unusual power of driving home vital truths and compelling attention. He was also an adventurer, in the best sense. The Bishop went on in his outspoken Colonial way: "I met Father Thornton for the first time on the first day of the Congress, and asked him for a few facts about himself, since I was to preside at this meeting, or rather whether various things I had heard about him were *facts*. He proved a most unsatisfactory person in respect of what I was able to elicit from him. I asked him whether he had nearly lost his life at the hands of a Red gang in north Russia; he replied that he seemed to remember something of the kind. I asked him whether he had been involved in a struggle for the possession of a revolver, and saved another man's life; he believed there was something connected with a revolver. I asked him whether on a dark night in an English country lane a certain killer had come off second best; he replied that he would have to look it up.\* . . . I conclude from your applause that you too have heard of these exploits. This adventurer will now give us his address."

In his seat in the hall Michael whispered: "Gabrielle, is all that true?" "The Bishop wouldn't bring it up if it wasn't." "Why haven't we heard about it?" "Probably in our cradles, child." Michael subsided, "Yes, mother."

There was a fresh outburst as the monk stood up.

"I gather," he began, "from his Excellency's remarks that

\* Vide *Pageant of Life*, *The Masterful Monk*, and *The Coming of the Monster*.

I am a person with a doubtful past." It brought laughter. He told them he was speaking on the subject of War and that he offered no apology for intruding it upon the peace and harmony of the Congress. "You are all of you alive to certain disturbing elements in Europe already constituting a menace to the world's peace, and it would be folly to pretend that Christians and Catholics are not concerned. We are human beings with the rest of humanity."

He proceeded to deal briefly with war in itself, what was meant by a just war as opposed to a war of aggression, before getting down to his main theme. He passed on to a review of war as waged down the centuries, with ever increasing armies and ever deadlier weapons. "It culminated in the World War of 1914 with its mechanised slaughter of millions by high-explosive shelling and bombing and the employment of poison-gas. The War to end war! A new world was coming: The brotherhood of nations was at hand. . . To-day we are painfully aware that the new world has not come, that instead of the brotherhood of nations we are witnessing again the fratricidal race for armaments. Does it look like the ending of war? . . . Had the peoples of the world in every nation concerned themselves, and not left it to politicians and statesmen, the War of 1914 could have been averted. If the peoples of the world do *not* concern themselves now, if once more they leave it to politicians and statesmen, the present trend will assume definite shape and a Second World War be in sight.

"I am not saying this to alarm you; I am putting into plain words what competent observers of events are no longer veiling, even if they use guarded terms.

"You and I, the ordinary people of this world, neither make war, nor declare war; but it is we who suffer from its colossal insanity, rather than those who make it and declare it. If, twenty years ago, the peoples of all nations had concerned themselves to demand, for the maintenance of world peace, an International Force in place of National Forces, the present issue of an aggressively and powerfully armed Germany would

never have arisen; for such a Germany would never have been allowed.

"Instead of an International Order with effective sanctions for instantly suppressing aggression, a League of Nations was established, whose ineffectiveness became apparent with the passing of the years. An as international institution for world peace the League of Nations has proved a pathetic failure, for no such institution could succeed unless empowered with effective physical and moral sanctions. Neither could such an institution succeed, used by the representatives of the nations for national ends, as the League of Nations has been used and in this respect been disqualified as an international institution.

"It is deplorable that the world's leaders paid no attention to Pope Benedict XV who saw so much further than themselves and that continued conscription of National armies, which an International Order would have abolished, must ultimately lead to another war and the reign once more of Armageddon.

"I was asked the other day by someone what I thought of the world prospect, and I answered to this effect: After twenty years of the League of Nations, of European Conferences at which the name of God was never mentioned and therefore God's help never sought, after twenty years of visionless diplomacy, of peace, if it can be called peace, unestablished, I can see nothing in the present ordering of things that holds any security for the future, but everything that spells disaster ahead.

"I am emphasising the situation because I want you to realise that if you, and thousands like you, the people of the world, the masses, instead of remaining passive, were by every constitutional means, openly to demand the establishment of an International Order equipped with a genuine International Force, then the Governments, now blundering along blindly, would be compelled to listen and to act, and the danger of war be averted. Our Governments, everywhere, are impressing upon us that we are the peoples of the Democracies. Very good then, we have the right to speak; above all, when it is our future that is at stake. So far we have not even been consulted ——"

The monk stopped. A shout had come from somewhere at

the back, "That's politics, not Christianity!" It was from a man standing wedged in the crowd under the gallery. In the silence that followed the monk turned to the chairman, who smiled and nodded.

"Very well," the interrupter was informed, "you tell me that I am talking politics, not Christianity. I can only reply that 'politics' is a very wide term, and that strictly I am not talking politics at all, but of the rights of human beings with which Christianity is intimately concerned."

The voice from the back came again: "Then stick to the rights, and don't attack the Governments of the British Empire!" It was supported by isolated cheers also from the back; the bulk of the audience remained tense and silent. The monk waited a moment.

"I carefully referred to the 'Governments of the Democracies.' I am not attacking them as such, neither am I attacking as such the Governments of the Empire. My objector should not give my remarks his own interpretation. I am attacking the failure of Governments to act, when by not acting, they are imperilling the future, the lives of millions, your life, sir, and the lives of the world's youth."

It brought a thunder of applause. The monk waited again. Nothing further came from under the gallery.

"The last occasion on which I was interrupted in public was in Edinburgh, which, as you may know, is in Scotland. The interruption lasted some ten minutes and consisted in monotonous booing. I suggested eggs for a change. No eggs came. And then I remembered I was in Scotland."

He watched them laughing with a smile on his face.

"Now that we're all happy again, may I resume from where we broke off. In urging upon you, the people, to act, I am not asking you to voice opinions or idiosyncrasies of my own, but what every rational human being can recognise as his right to demand because vital to human security. There can be, and there will be, no security whilst nations conscript their own armies; for, humiliating though it may be, the plain fact of it is written in history — nations cannot be trusted with armies

and arms of their own, beyond the small force required for internal order.

"There could be, and there would be, security in the integration into a single World Force of the common Forces of all nations, for the self-protection of the one human family. I can see no other way in which freedom from war can be attained, as far as human endeavour can attain it, than by the International ordering of the world, the one common sharing of all Force, and, under God, the one common keeping of the World's Peace."

PART II  
*INTERIM*



## CHAPTER XVII

ON A DAY in March of 1939, Thornton, from the deck of a liner moving slowly down Hudson Harbour, watched rather wistfully the receding sky-scrappers of New York. They enclosed many things he had learned to love.

The sky-scrappers themselves he did not love. They roused within him a certain antagonism, blocking out everything Christian in their midst, every spire, every cross, proclaiming man's puny might, hiding from sight something mightier.

He regarded the people about him also looking their last on New York, his companions for the next few days — a woman nearby quietly crying, a bunch of obviously American businessmen, some children as obviously English dodging amongst the passengers, playing "tick," no sentiment for them.

He looked at the haversack at his feet with an embarrassing bottle sticking out, pressed upon him at the last moment by friends who had been seeing him off. He picked it up and surreptitiously pushed at the bottle until it was inside. A girl in front of him was pointing out to a young man the Statue of Liberty away to the right of the ship's bows. The monk studied it rising imposingly over the waters; he rather liked it, standing as it did for something far greater than sky-scrappers.

Once more he looked back at New York . . .

A chapter in his life had closed.

Down in his cabin he stood regarding his kit. It appeared to be about double the amount with which he had left England fourteen months ago. Someone had insisted on buying him a couple of bags, "so as you can see we got horseskin in the States." What he had seen on opening them was "English make" on the inside. Without them he could never have packed. It was the trophies of his journeyings that took up space.

Mostly they were gifts which he had not had the heart to re-

fuse—an amber block of gum from a Kaori forest, a jagged chunk of pumice from a dead volcano, a riotously-coloured stuffed parrot which had been a positive nightmare to pack, products of New Zealand and Australia; hard-wood ash-trays from the West Indies, American gadgets galore, an electric razor that he was certain he would never use, having tried it and found his face *in statu quo ante*; photographs of everything, everybody, everywhere, some of himself with Hollywood stars; tobaccos, cigarettes, candies all bunged in with his clothes . . .

The monk sighed, took off his overcoat, and began unpacking the things he would need; it had been packing and unpacking for months. . . His cabin-steward appeared to tell him there was tea in the Lounge. He finished his task, put things in order, and went along.

Half an hour later he was back again, sitting in the easy chair the cabin provided with a package of unopened letters before him on the table. They had reached him this morning in New York, just in time. He began slitting open envelopes, glancing at the contents of each in turn. There was one addressed in a handwriting that he recognised immediately. He put it aside and continued with the rest. His task completed, he swept the lot together and put them into a large envelope which he marked "unanswered" and then consigned to a drawer.

He picked up the letter he had laid aside, smiling to himself, and opened it. It was from Michael St. Helier, headed with a coat of arms, and from "Hollingham, near Guildford, Surrey."

"Dear Padre,

"I am hoping this will catch you before you leave the U.S.A. Thank you for your last, and the description of the South Sea Islands, Hollywood, etc. Hollywood leaves me cold, but the Islands sound glorious. You say little about yourself, but I gather that the American tour is going strong. What a life! Gabrielle showed me an account of you in a Catholic paper—thousands turned away every night! I'll never forget New Zealand and your way of taking everything in your stride. I

envy you. No, I don't; my life here is all I want in this world.

"I'll have a lot to tell you when you're back. You're right, Padre, the whole of life is different as a Catholic—the tremendous reality of the supernatural behind everything.

"I told you about the Chapel here and the priest who comes over to say Mass. The Chapel is as much part of my life as the garden. I make my Communion every morning and an hour's visit at night. Sir John St. Laurence insists on my making the Chapel my own. He's a bit grim at times, but he's decent to the core. He still regards me more as one of the family than his paid gardener, and, I suspect, looks upon the situation more or less as a joke. However, Gabrielle assures me that he is 'highly satisfied' with the gardening. I am hoping to provide them with a riot of colour from the Spring onwards. I spent two months before Christmas building up an Alpine Rockery facing the south wing, and I think it's going to be rather stupendous. It was heavy work—twenty tons of stone, mainly Westmorland, and every variety of Alpine, rooting well, I think.

"Sir John, by the way, asked me to accept a couple of rooms in the house itself, instead of living in this cottage. I hope I did the right thing, but I decided *not*. For one thing I'm fond of this cottage now that I've my things from Chesters; also for a professional gardener, which I *am*, to live in the house with the family seems out of place. Incidentally the cottage gives me a chance of study, since I'm anxious to become as proficient as possible. I've a young library now on gardening.

"So here I remain. I look after my own breakfast and lunch, but have dinner with them up at the house in the evening; I gave in on that.

"Did I tell you about my visit to Chesters? No, I don't think I could have. This is what happened; it was funny in a way, but also fairly ghastly.

"I wrote to my father, saying that I was back in England, had taken up a profession, and was coming up to Chesters the following week to collect my own furniture from my room. He wrote back saying that he had 'no objection' to my collecting it, and signed the letter merely 'St. Helier,' from which I as-

sumed they had, for practical purposes, cast me off. I think he and my stepmother must have reconsidered the matter previous to my arrival which I timed with the removals van. We reached Chesters together about lunch time.

"They both looked much the same, and to my surprise asked me to have lunch. At the end of the meal my stepmother suddenly turned on her glamour, suggested that bygones be by-gones, and that I take up my residence again at Chesters. I saw through it of course (marriage into the peerage and all that) and told them that I would gladly forget the past, but that I was fixed up in life now and couldn't change. My father, who had evidently assumed that my 'profession' was bunkum, said that I could do equally well at Chesters whatever I was doing at Hollingham. I replied that he would be unlikely to accept me as paid gardener at Chesters. It took me five minutes to convince them that I was speaking the truth and working as a professional gardener.

"My father went off the deep end and my stepmother tried sob-stuff — the family name! Society scandal! Luckily a telephone call for my father intervened. I went up to my room and assisted the removals men. We got everything into the van in the end, but just as I was going to start for the station a car drove up and unloaded one of my stepmother's lounge-lizards whom I remembered as a fairly foul sort of person — intriguing with her behind my father's back in a way that used to make me see red. I went in after him through the front door, gave him a minute, and then followed him into the lounge where I knew my stepmother was alone. She had her arms round his neck. I told them just exactly what they were. The lounge-lizard came for me, but I sent him flying on to a divan to think it over. My stepmother went livid under her paint. I told her that my contribution to the family scandal should be bearable, seeing that Chesters already stank throughout the County. After which I bowed and left.

"Rather horrible? I suppose I shall never see Chesters again. Anyway.

"What did you think of Munich? Dreadful suspense here in

England. The situation's eased of course. In Sir John's opinion, however, the Government has little faith in Hitler even now.

"One other thing. You will be glad to know this. I *am* better as regards 'horrors.' Very much better, I believe. There was a car accident on a main road near here a few days ago. I was coming back from a Nursery-gardens and saw it happen a hundred yards ahead. I *did* hesitate, I admit, before I ran for the place; but I *did* it. It was a bad smash and the driver of one of the cars was vilely knocked about, head bleeding appallingly and arm broken. We did our best for him and got him up to the hospital. He's recovering all right, however. I was a bit shaky after it, but I don't think I 'panicked' at all. I knelt before the Crucifix in the chapel (you remember what you told me), and it was almost as if nothing had happened. Gabrielle said she had noticed nothing at dinner when I told her about it afterwards. I think she's as happy over it, as I am. It's given me a sort of confidence, if you know what I mean."

"I think that's about all."

"Padre, when you're back, you're to come down to Hollingham as soon as you can. They're looking forward to seeing you here. It will be great, meeting again after all these months."

"I've said nothing about a matter that's rather troubling me at present. It's not the kind of thing one can write about. I'll tell you when you're here. It's about Gabrielle."

"So until ——

Yrs affectionately,  
Michael."

The monk folded the letter and put it back into its envelope. For a minute he sat still. He took out the letter again and read through the last few lines a second time.

About Gabrielle?

He filled his pipe slowly, wondering. Michael gave him no clue. He seemed to be in doubt about something.

The letter left no doubts about Chesters.

Poor Michael! It had been his home.

Thornton felt in his pocket for his lighter, found it and lit up. He was glad the other had told him about the car accident. Michael had not "panicked" this time?

There had been no "attack" apparently, Gabrielle's word for it. Thank God for that. Thornton had little doubt but that the reorientation of his spiritual outlook accounted largely for the decreasing hold upon him of "horrors"; by the letter his religion had become the big thing in his life.

Michael had made his decision during the tour of New Zealand. It was after an address on, "The Church Unconquerable," the monk had given in the Town Hall at Wellington. "I've made up my mind. Or rather, the Almighty has made it up for me." There seemed to be no difficulties or objections left.

Michael had had to be given the formal instructions of course. The monk had managed to fit them in on their journeyings, between lectures in halls and cinemas, broadcasting, interviews with the press, visiting Colleges and Convents. Sometimes the instruction had been in a car, as they drove through forests in which the bell-bird could be heard tinkling its uncanny tune.

He remembered Rotorua in the North island — Michael and himself sitting on a boulder before a lake of boiling mud, "geysers" shooting steam around them, Michael listening conscientiously to an instruction on the Sacraments, poking with a walking-stick at the soft surface beneath their feet, the puff of steam that had suddenly come, and then more puffs in quick succession. "Sorry, Padre, I've started a geyser." They had retired to where the earth's crust was thicker.

There had been the range of snow mountains down in the South — Michael gazing at their incredible beauty, thrilled to the depth of his being, as he thrilled to everything glorious in nature. For a while he had been unable to speak, watching their white aloofness, the mystery of their sunlit peaks. Thornton had decided to skip the instruction, but Michael had said, "Now, begin" . . .

And their discussion of the address he had given in Auckland on War, eating sandwiches in a valley near Napier scarred with

great yawning gulfs from the earthquake that had overwhelmed the city; Michael had been jubilant over his denunciation that evening and retracted the over-hasty conclusion he had drawn on a previous, less happy occasion.

They had been back in Auckland by the end of May. The monk who had been booked for a course of addresses in the Cathedral before leaving for Australia had consulted with the Bishop about Michael. The latter had been handed over to one of the Cathedral priests for a final polish and been received into the Church by the monk himself when the addresses were over, Gabrielle and all the Hargreaves present.

The Hargreaves had thrown a party the same evening in Michael's honour, at which that dreadful youngest had toasted the "unsatisfactory pair" with the injunction, "May you be boiled," if they failed to pull it off on the return voyage to England together.

A week later the monk had stood on the quay in Auckland Harbour with the Hargreaves and other friends waving to two figures leaning over the taffrail as the liner moved slowly away — Gabrielle returning to England and Hollingham, and, with her, Michael to the life he had determined upon.

Two days later the monk himself had left for Australia.

He had found the Australians with the same enthusiasms and freedoms of the New Young World as the New Zealanders, and with even less English starch.

His tour, organised beforehand, had involved long distances by car along roads screeching with gay-coloured parrots. He had liked their cities — Sydney, somewhat Americanised; Brisbane, Adelaide, Newcastle, Melbourne with its Catholic Cathedral of lofty spires. Wide and open. Catholic enthusiasm had proved inspiring; he had been mobbed on one occasion after a meeting. The Archbishops with whom he had stayed, and whom he had met at the New Zealand Congress, had overwhelmed him with Australian hospitality. Big men, who denounced evil fearlessly and stood as fearlessly for the things of God.

In Sydney he had spoken in the open Domain to a crowd that stretched as far as the voice could reach. A breezy, humourous, typically Australian crowd with no use for bigotry. A man had tried to heckle him in an unpleasant, cynical way, but someone behind had pushed his hat over his face every time he opened his mouth.

Australia. The land of the Rising Sun!

He had sailed from Sydney in the middle of July on an American liner bound for Los Angeles.

That voyage through the South Sea Islands had been a panorama of haunting beauty, a long glory of blue lagoons and yellow sands, and an atmosphere of far-away peace.

Michael would certainly have been thrilled.

At Suva in the Fijians, where they had docked, he had been prevailed upon to address the assembled Christian Brothers' school of Fijian and Indian boys. The Indian boys had proved painfully intelligent whilst he himself was feeling painfully unintelligent in the tropical, midday heat. An assemblage of island schoolgirls had sung him a melody of farewell, some of them appearing on the quay later to see the great white liner move away in the roseate sunset. He had noticed one or two weeping unrestrainedly to the good-bye tune of the ship's amplifiers sounding over the sapphire waters. The monk had felt sobby himself.

At Pagga-Pagga, near the Equator, he had seen an island almost untouched by civilisation, and thanked God for it — the native market ablaze with coloured draperies, handicrafts and fruit. The native girls at the school had welcomed him with their customary sitting-down dance — moving in rhythm, gesturing and singing all in one act. He had been shown a church whose whole roof had recently been lifted by a hurricane, though in the still heat it was difficult to believe it.

There had been a wave of excitement on board, approaching the big noise in American islands, Honolulu. After Pagga-Pagga the monk had found it not too pleasing. Honolulu was undeniably beautiful, but its city stank of commercialism and

a strong odour of the world, the flesh and the devil. He had not felt in the least sobby when the liner moved off from Honolulu.

A week later they were nearing the Californian coast, a flock of albatross wheeling overhead — the white-winged guardian angels of the Pacific.

The liner had docked at Los Angeles. It was the monk's first landing on American soil. Three hours later at the Biltmore Hotel a couple of pressmen were asking for his impressions of America! He had gone down with them into the vestibule and found awaiting him a person whom he had radiogrammed from the boat, who advanced, Hollywood regulation walk, straight back and bull-neck complete:

"Say, Padre, you're sure looking swell!"

Charles Withers and himself had gripped.

They had dined together, the film comedian questioning him on his adventurings and in turn putting him wise to Hollywood. The man was looking healthier and had shed his superfluous fat. The monk had remarked on it.

"Sure. I bin keepin' the drinkin' under. And it ent bin always easy. But I jest says — Charles Withers, you gotta remember the Padre pickin' up that glass."

Thornton had smiled: "Good man!"

Charles Withers had arrived next morning seated at the wheel of an enormous car resplendent with chromium fittings flashing in the Californian sun. "You gotta live up to it in Hollywood, Padre." Thornton had regarded the hat in his hand doubtfully, and stopped him at the first hat-shop.

He had learned something about "hustle" during the three days at his disposal for seeing Hollywood. The city, adjoining Los Angeles, spread far and wide over the plain to the green Beverley Hills, "where the Stars live." A city of white and gold, beautifully laid out. Champagne air and clear brilliant sunshine. The great studios of the film companies dotted about, each of them occupying acres. Hordes strolling the streets in make-up, with yellow-ochred faces proclaiming they were in the shooting of some film.

The monk had made no pretence of not being thrilled by Hollywood. It was impossible for a person of his interests not to be stirred by a city that contained within itself the means of influencing, for good or evil, the whole world.

Charles Withers had shown him round as though he were the President of the United States, introducing him to various film stars at their studios: "Meet the man as tours continents with his preachin'—Padre Thornton!" The directors on the different sets had all been very kind. He watched three or four films in the making, cameramen on their mobile platforms wheeling in for a shot; houses, woods, gardens, lakes running on wheels into position, glycerine tears being applied, dummies dropping from synthetic cliffs or hurtling down synthetic staircases, amidst the dead silence imperative during shooting.

It had all been compellingly interesting—that self-contained Hollywood world of fantastic artifices and mechanisms, and a complete technique of its own. The very Stars themselves appeared to be standardised, their every gesture; and yet somehow they retained their personality and used it. He had been photographed standing with them on the sets beneath the blaze of arc-lamps, or lunched with them in the canteens. They were very human beings he discovered.

On one of the sets Withers had told him to wait a moment and gone off. He had returned a few minutes later with someone Thornton had instantly recognised—Taylor, the little make-up man! The three of them had dined together that evening at the Biltmore.

Charles Withers had indubitably done things "swell."

They had said good-bye on the platform of Los Angeles station before he boarded the streamlined silver monster that he understood was his train.

"Remember the tough stuff you did on me, Padre, that masquerade night on the boat?"

"I remember something of the kind."

"Wal, it got me thinkin'—religion ent so soft as it's figured. An' when I done a little more thinkin', I sez—Charles Withers, you gotta get on your knees. An' Charles Withers' doin'

it, if you understand. . . Thanks a lot, Padre, for what you done."

Thornton had laid his hand on the other's shoulder, something inspiring him to ask whether he remembered Michael St. Helier.

"Sure, I remember him. He was kind to me after what I done."

Thornton had told him St. Helier was now a Catholic.

"That so?" A light had appeared in the other's eyes. "Wal, I bin thinkin' that way myself, seein' it's your religion. An' I bin reckonin' I ent that good."

The monk had assured him that nobody was "that good." He had awakened to a train-steward calling, "Step up, folks! And make it snappy!"

He had made it snappy, and then leaned down from the compartment door:

"There are plenty of priests in Los Angeles."

They had gripped.

"An' I reckon one of em'll be seein' Charles Withers. . . Bless you, Padre."

There were tears in the film comedian's eyes as the train moved slowly away.

The monk had gazed through the compartment window at the wide spaces of country rolling by. . .

Charles Withers.

The man who had insulted Gabrielle St. Laurence.

Burlesqued Michael St. Helier in that unpleasant way.

With whom in that fit of drunken temper he himself had been involved in a public brawl.

And for whom he had picked up some glass.

Who had been getting the drinking under.

And now —

With the grace of God in his soul!

The wide spaces had rolled by more swiftly as the silver serpent gathered speed. Its air-conditioned interior was his

domicile for the time being. Three thousand, four hundred miles. Los Angeles to New York. West to East. He had decided it was a great life, if you didn't weaken.

There had been a week in New York. He had found the offices of the Bureau that was organising his coming tour of the States. The preparatory publicity had alarmed him:

"But I'm really not — all this."

He had indicated the sheets of sketched out trailers proclaiming Father Anselm Thornton, "The golden-voiced orator from England," "The man you are waiting to hear," "The silver-voiced —"

"I'm not golden-voiced *and* silver-voiced."

One was for Chicago, the other for Boston the publicity agent had assured him.

"Maybe. But you'll leave out the gold and the silver."

He had seen something of New York during the week. His first impression was of sky-scrappers, sky-scrappers, and again sky-scrappers. Overwhelming. They blocked out the sunlight, every view. Then he had seen them from Central Park, at night, and away from their claustrophobic proximity — myriads of lights, fairy lamps, filling the void between heaven and earth, twinkling, mysterious, enchanting. The sky-scrappers should be wheeled away in the daytime like those structures in the studios of Hollywood.

Broadway, he had decided, should be wheeled away altogether. The world's greatest pleasure centre! A maelstrom of theatres, cinemas, dirty shows. "Glamour girls," "Lovelies," "Walk right in and see for yourself." At night, one vast dazzle of Neon nightmares of every conceivable and inconceivable design; cacophonies of amplified noise; a bedlam of self-stultifying vulgarity, everything individual cancelled out. And America boasted its showmanship!

Why they sang songs about Broadway, the last thing on earth to make a song about, he couldn't conceive. Honolulu was a perfume to Broadway.

He had sailed on the Santa Paula for Jamaica where he was

due before getting to work in the States in October. It had been hot enough in Jamaican midwinter when he had gone ashore there with Michael and Charles Withers; it was the clinging damp heat now of tropical West Indies midsummer, and he had dripped away steadily giving addresses in stifling churches and halls.

He had been warned never to allude to the differences in colour, which with Jamaicans varied from light brown to jet black; for the black stood for something best forgotten — the slavery of West African Negroes under English planters. Their descendants were there by the thousands, hypersensitive of black skin, blubber lips and fuzzy hair. He had talked to a convent girls' school; the fairer girls had sat smiling and beaming, their black sisters hanging their heads.

He had talked in many parts of that lovely island in England's possession, and never quite lost a sense of shame. He had seen a poorhouse, a scandal of degradation; a Leper colony, hygienically unspeakable, that had angered the medical man in him; the squalid broken-down shanties that housed the Negroes. He had used an opportunity of expressing an Englishman's opinion in plain English and received a reprimand from a comfortably placed personage for his pains.

He had said Mass for those lepers enduring their living death behind gates that might well have been inscribed, "Abandon hope, all you who enter here." They had asked for a talk from the English priest. He had tried to convey it to eyes sunken in disease-ravaged faces — to look beyond the earthly tragedy of their lives, to their stricken bodies made whole again, no longer maimed or marred, but eternally glorified. They had been able to follow him like all natives who talked pigeon-English.

At the Bureau in New York on his return he had stared at the completed schedule for his tour of the U.S.A. It covered October to the following March. He was to speak in most of the big cities, East and Mid-West, in Town Halls, Universities, College auditoriums, theatres; to be prepared for broadcasts

and press interviews; on occasions there would be two, even three lectures a day; there were the times of his trains clearly noted, where he would stay; the subjects, from his own list, on which he would talk, the times of the meetings, the exact price the agent had agreed upon, and the exact agent's commission to be deducted. The whole thing suggested a talking-machine being leased out. However, it seemed to be the way these things were done in the States.

It had been the most closely packed of his tours.

He had revised his opinion of that meticulously worked-out schedule, having learned by experience its value in saving both time and hustle and all bother about trains and cars and hotels. Everything arranged and on the spot. You obeyed the schedule and the schedule saw to it that you were there, the publicity-pulled audience awaiting you, the broadcasting manager inviting, "Just come this way," the hotel office attendant smiling, "Yessir, we have your name," and handing him over to a bell-hop.

His English preconceptions of Americans themselves had also had to be revised. They might be hard-boiled in business and worldly affairs; as audiences their spontaneity was undeniable and infectious. The quick responsiveness of the University and College boys and girls was something he had been totally unprepared for. He had learned to love those eager faces looking up into his own, alight with enthusiasm, their complete freedom from shyness in putting questions, and jumping up with another when not satisfied.

The bright young things of America!

The Communist groups of English Universities with their sneering opposition appeared to have no counterpart in America. If they were there in the auditoriums their presence was unseen and unheard.

He had found the cities less inspiring than the Colleges — design and beauty sacrificed to size. Chicago and Washington excepted; the former with its superb frontage to Lake Michigan, the latter sumptuously laid out and dominated by Capitol, White House, and Government buildings, wide open spaces

around, the whole magnificence of it flood-lit by night; the sky-lines of both in pleasing contrast with the jitter-bug sky-line of New York.

Chicago, where his program had been heavy, had filled his priest's soul with joy—the great Servite church of "Our Lady of Sorrows"; seventy-five thousand or so every Friday queued ten deep all the day, moving slowly forward, entering each hour to make the Devotion of the "Via Matris," the previous congregation moving slowly out. The corporate strength of the Faith in America. One of the unforgettable things of his tour.

He had preached to that mighty multitude one Friday evening at the Devotion including the Blessing of the Sick, broadcast to the world at large in the best American manner. The Sacristy suggested a radio station, set-up and commentator complete. As he left it to go to the microphone he heard the commentator's voice announce: "Father Thornton now enters the church. . . He advances to the altar . . . and genuflects. . ." The rest was lost. He was to be asked later, on his return to England, whether the following version of the rest was correct: ". . . He is now making the sign of the Cross. Gee, what a sign of the Cross!"

There were other unforgettable cities.

Boston, with its gentler touch of an older world; the Irish softening down of nasal American; its Copley-Plaza Hotel in whose resplendent Lounge his audience had occupied golden chairs. St. Paul, where he had spoken to an electrically alive crowd out-of-doors. St. Louis, with the great Mississippi rolling by. He had broadcast there in the American question and answer style; his questioner had plied him with questions framed to draw his opinion on affairs in Europe, Hitler's intentions, England's attitude to the German Third Reich. He had answered cautiously pointing out that he was not a politician: "I'm not as wicked as that." He had not enjoyed that questioning, that skating on thin ice; for things in Europe were already in the balance, far more than was generally known. "In the event of another European war, do you consider that America should keep out of it?" his questioner had finally

plumped on him in that uncomfortably direct American way. He could only reply: "That is not for an Englishman, but for Americans to decide. So far there is not another European war."

There nearly *was* a few days later.

For like a thunderbolt Munich crashed upon the world.

And with it that ugly suspense.

England and Germany.

Chamberlain and Hitler.

War or Peace?

New York had observed a day of prayer.

It was not the American people, but a section of the American Press that had proved irresponsible at the crisis, doing its best to goad England into war. With the news that it was to be Peace the same papers had virtually yelled "yellow" at England. The monk had been roused to reply in a press interview: "I know, no more than you know, whether Hitler will keep his word. I do know however that had the Prime Minister of England acted otherwise, a second world conflagration would have been the result. It is not a mere question of England and Germany, or whether the policy of appeasement is the coward's way, as certain of your newspapers assume. It is a question of whether millions of the world's youth, of women and children, are to be sacrificed on the altar of Armageddon because of a man's lust for power. No war in these days could be confined to Europe. . . I want you to appreciate the choice with which the Prime Minister of England was faced. I suggest that to avert war is not necessarily a policy of cowardice."

Munich had shaken the world, and left a disturbing sense of insecurity, for all that the crisis was over.

Was the danger over?

The monk had found that question simmering in the background of his much-occupied mind. He had gone straight on with his schedule; there had been one cancellation of a meeting in the midst of the ferment, but no more.

Munich had set him wondering about Michael.

If it had been war, just what would that young man have done? Michael, on an occasion in New Zealand, had made it perfectly plain to him, for all his more reasonable attitude, that nothing would induce him to fight in war: "I couldn't kill, if I wanted to. They could conscript me, but nothing would make me kill."

January and February of 1939 had been largely occupied with preachings in various churches in New York and the Eastern cities, "going places" in high-powered cars. As usual, everything according to schedule. If the schedule said 7 p.m., the car made it by 7 p.m. There was an automatic reliability about American means of transport which disposed of flurry. If you went places you were there on the dot.

That strenuous five months had at length ended.

He had consulted the schedule for the last time with the knowledge that if America had worked him hard, it had also given him a swell time.

He had been to the Bureau to report and settle up, and thank them for their excellent staff-work. The Bureau in turn had congratulated him.

A most amicable business deal concluded.

That had been three days ago.

After which it had been good-byes and packing . . .

The ship's bugle-boy, sounding for dinner, awakened him with a start to the present.

He looked at his watch and raised himself from his lolling position. Michael's letter on the table caught his eye. He picked it up and put it in his pocket, then stood up and went slowly across to the port-hole. The sea was sweeping by smoothly and the evening light fading on the horizon. . .

It was over.

Fifteen months' labours and adventures.

One hundred thousand miles of journeying?

It would be roughly that by the time he reached England.

He smiled half-wistfully.

He had seen many lands since England, many oceans since England's seas, many peoples since England's people.

But England was the land of his birth.

He would look back on it all in days to come . . . those vivid scenes . . . native races and Hollywood stars . . . blue lagoons and yellow sands, forests and snow-capped mountains, rivers and lakes . . . tropical sunsets, palms and the silver moon, blazing stars of the Southern Cross, the golden glory of God in the heavens . . .

This incredibly beautiful world!

PART III

*MICHAEL AND GABRIELLE*



## CHAPTER XVIII

I'M LOOKING for the tradesmen's entrance.”  
Gabrielle started.

“Padre!”

She rose quickly from the escritoire and came out through the open glass-doors on to the lawn. He put down a suitcase and took the hands held out to him.

“You're really here?”

She stood there taking him in.

“You're looking splendid.”

“You're looking more beautiful than ever,” he returned. She was in riding-dress and it became her perfectly. By her colour she had just been riding. She was quizzing him uncertainly.

“Isn't there something American about you?”

“There is. The hat. Hollywood.”

She wrinkled her nose at it. He took it off and threw it on to a seat nearby. They had got his telegram, she told him: “But you're going to *stay*.”

“The Abbot said a week, and I always obey my Abbot.”

“The telegram said ‘for the night’?”

“So that you'd ask me to stay longer.”

She laughed, and asked him whether he had come up by the Beech Avenue. He had, and it was glorious.

He looked about him, at the well-kept lawns, the yew hedges correctly trimmed. Spring was early, and the beds all round ablaze with polyanthus in full flower, hyacinths, daffodils, iris, sprinklings of forget-me-not. Everything carefully tended. Orderly without being over-formal. He indicated it all:

“Michael?”

“Yes, everything. He's amazing.”

There was a pause.

“How's it working?” he asked.

"Perfectly. Father's tremendously pleased." She added, "I doubt if he'll ever take it quite seriously, though. . . What about finding Michael?"

She led him to the left, and round the house. They came to a low-walled terrace running the length of the south front.

"He's made us an Alpine Rockery."

So Michael had told him in a letter, he said. He gazed at the long Elizabethan frontage, stone-mullioned windows, walls mellowed with age, warm coloured in the midday sun. The chimneys above weathered by the years. The home of the St. Laurences for centuries. Hollingham.

"It's the kind of place one dreams of."

He stood there with his eyes on a great cedar noting the wide spread of its branches, under which generations of St. Laurences must have passed. Beyond, there was a line of elms sheltering a stream, the sound of it accentuating the stillness. Birds on the wing and their songs in the sun. Yes. . . He could understand Michael being happy here.

"This is peace."

"I know. Hollingham. I should imagine you need some after America. . . Now ——"

"Yes, where's that young man?"

She pointed to a clump of shrubs a hundred yards away to the left, bordering what was manifestly Michael's Rockery. They took the broad stone path which led from the terrace-steps and ran down the centre of the south lawn, lined at intervals with ball-boxes in green tubs — again all perfectly kept. Gabrielle suddenly touched his arm and pointed.

A figure with tousled hair was visible through a gap in the shrubs, bending down as though considering. They went across the grass and stopped within a few yards. Michael was absorbed in the task of clipping a shrub and hadn't heard them. He straightened himself and surveyed, a pair of clippers poised.

"A shade more off the top," Thornton suggested.

Michael wheeled round. . .

"Padre! . . . Yoicks!"

He strode up to them. Thornton gripped a soil-stained hand. Michael was in corduroys and a shirt, with sleeves rolled up exposing brown muscular arms. Tanned face and earth-caked boots complete.

"Perfect!" Thornton decided. He expressed a doubt, however, whether the best gardeners would let out "Yoicks!" at a respectable clergyman.

Michael grinned. He stood still, taking the monk in as Gabrielle had: "The same old Padre."

"He's staying a week," Gabrielle announced.

Michael let out another, "Yoicks!"

He remonstrated that he could have met him with the car, but he hadn't said what train.

"The Beech Avenue," Thornton replied cryptically, "demands solitude and peace."

"And an American hat," Gabrielle put in.

"Gabrielle's been rude about my Hollywood hat," Thornton told him.

"Hollywood hat?"

"I had to leave it on a seat."

"May the cat have kittens in it!" Michael exclaimed.

Gabrielle explained that Michael had developed an anti-Hollywood complex. The latter ignored it:

"Padre, what in the name of heaven induced you to go to Hollywood?"

"Human interest."

"That sink of soul-destroying —— No, it's too soon to argue."

Thornton informed them that Hollywood had failed to destroy the soul of Charles Withers; he was becoming a Catholic.

"Charles Withers!" came simultaneously.

"Charles Withers," he repeated.

He told them. Gabrielle could scarcely credit it. Michael retracted his pious hope of kittens; he would bury the hat reverently instead.

Thornton asked if the gardener might be allowed to show him round.

"The gardener may have a half-day," Gabrielle answered.  
The gardener touched his forelock;  
"Thank you, ma'am."

Gabrielle left them together, and went up to the house. Michael linked his arm in Thornton's: "Padre, this is great!" He led him to the centre path and stationed him facing the Rockery:

"Have a good look, and then tell me what you think."

The Rockery extended the width of the lawn, some forty yards, culminating in banks of shrubs on either side; stone steps in the centre leading up from the pathway to the higher ground beyond. There were pockets of Westmorland rock and other limestones, filled with Alpines of every variety, some of them already in flower; sunken bird-baths, dwarf conifers interspersed providing green. The whole rose to a level of some six feet. Thornton was frankly amazed.

"Well — congratulations, Michael. It's stupendous."

He asked:

"You did it all yourself?"

"An under-gardener helped."

"But, you designed everything?"

"Yes, of course."

It sounded as if an Alpine Rockery was the simplest thing in the world.

"What was here before?"

"A buttress-wall, holding the bank. We left some bricks underneath. Drainage."

Michael led him closer and began pointing out the various species — Aubrietia, Sedum, Saxifraga, Alyssum, Arabis, Snow-on-the-mountains, Phlox, Cyclamen, Gentiana — all neatly clumped in their own pockets, the whole a delicacy of coloured lace-work in the exquisiteness of its first year's growth.

"'And there from morn till even, I dream away the hours,'" the monk quoted half to himself. Michael smiled. There was that look in his eyes that Thornton remembered — almost reverential, in the presence of the beautiful in nature. He gazed about him, at the smooth green stretches of lawn, the

radiant borders alight with the April sun. Michael's work. The Viscount's son who had become a gardener. There was no need to ask him whether he was happy in it. He radiated happiness. . . Except that . . . There had been something in his manner with Gabrielle. . .

Half an hour later they were standing before the front-entrance of the house. Michael had shown him over the fruit-garden, the grape-house and the stables, and finally his cottage furnished with his things from Chesters. Inside, whilst he was inspecting a collection of old books, Michael had confided shyly: "It's true what I said in my letter — about the 'horrors,' you know. It's all sort of lifted, if you can understand."

There were seven gardeners in all, it seemed. One of them, at work in the grape-house, had called Michael, "Sir"; he had frowned slightly and remarked as they came out, "I can't get these men to drop the 'Sir.'"

Michael opened the front-door for him:

"See you later, Padre."

He smiled and walked off.

So he was not going to have lunch with them?

Gabrielle was in the hall, and came forward. She had changed from her riding-dress.

"Isn't Michael — "

She looked annoyed.

"Really, he's stupid. I asked him to have lunch with us today."

Michael obviously was not going to do so.

"It's his principle, isn't it?" Thornton queried. "He said something about it in a letter."

"I know, but he carries it too far. Besides, you are here."

Michael was certainly sticking to his principle.

"He has dinner with you at night?"

"Oh yes; he's Michael St. Helier when his work's done."

Thornton hesitated.

"I rather think I agree with Michael. He's not going to play at it."

"Yes, but ——"

She stuck. He waited a moment.

"Michael can't do things by halves," he remarked. "He was the same on board ship when he saw he'd have to be sociable; he couldn't be sociable enough. He insisted on never missing an instruction when we were knocking about New Zealand. He's a gardener now, and he's going to be a gardener." He asked her, "You admit things are working; it's his attitude, isn't it?"

"Not so much his general attitude. More ——"

She checked herself, and the next moment was colouring. He was not sure what she had been going to say. More his personal ——? Michael's manner with her in the garden recurred to him. Except for that touch of humour, "Thank you, ma'am," he had almost ignored her presence. . . There had been that hint of something in his letter . . . "It's about Gabrielle"? . . .

"Here's father, Padre."

Thornton found himself shaking hands with Sir John St. Laurence.

In the lounge he was introduced to Lady St. Laurence and various people gathered there for lunch—a married sister of Gabrielle's and her husband staying at Hollingham. There was a cheerful looking young man in horn-rimmed glasses, Sir John's secretary. A couple of men with the tanned faces of huntsmen came forward, cousins of the family, and two girls who had come over with them from somewhere by car. The well-bred voices struck his ear pleasantly after the nasal tones he had become accustomed to in the States.

Lady St. Laurence had a quaint touch of the Victorian about her not quite in accord with the modern cocktails a manservant was serving. A miniature come to life. She had given Gabrielle and the married sister her refinement of feature, and to Gabrielle the loveliness that must once have been her own.

Michael had described Sir John aptly, "a bit grim, but decent to the core." The grimness was in the rather severe mouth,

but there was kindness in the deep-set grey eyes. He was asking Thornton about his Hargreave cousins whom he understood he had met in New Zealand, when a gong boomed through the house. Thornton caught Lady St. Laurence's voice nearby: "St. Helier's coming in to lunch, isn't he?" and Gabrielle's reply, "I tried, mother, but it was no good."

Sir John must have overheard for he muttered to himself, "Sticks to his guns, eh?" Aloud he said to Thornton, "I've to thank you for our flower-gardener, Padre." Thornton protested that it was his own daughter who should be thanked: "It's a success, isn't it?" Sir John took him by the elbow and led him after the others: "It's a devil of an amusing situation. He's my gardener by day and a deuced interesting young man of my own standing to talk with at night. It's beyond me, but, damn it, I admire him for doing it; and I'd not find a better man for flowers in the county."

The quiet dignity that was Hollingham's pervaded lunch. A couple of footmen moving silently with dishes; Lady St. Laurence and Sir John maintaining a courteous control over conversation; subdued voices, no one left out or forgotten. The manners of a world that was passing.

Not until the cheese-straws were being handed did Lady St. Laurence ask in her clear voice:

"May we hear something of your travels, Father Thornton?"

Faces turned smilingly in his direction. It was evidently expected of him. He bowed to her.

It would have to be selective. Not Broadway.

An incident occurred during coffee.

It was served on the terrace in the sun.

One of the girls who had come over by car remarked casually that she had been hunting in the north. Sir John asked if the going had been good. The going had been all right, but she had found the Hunt an unpleasant crowd. They had finished near a place called Chesters, and some of the Hunt had gone on there for drinks — Viscount St. Helier's place, she believed.

She had not gone with them, in fact refused. A huntsman, whose manners left much to be desired, had made a sneering remark to the effect that ladies were no longer interested in Chesters since the "damn fool of a son" had left. From further remarks she had gathered a rumour that the son in question was working as a gardener. She asked Sir John whether there was likely to be any truth in it — "Michael" had been the name, if she remembered right.

There was an embarrassing silence.

Sir John, without answering, put down his coffee cup, went to the low wall of the terrace which faced the south lawn, and shaded his eyes to the sun.

"Come here, young lady."

She did so, mystified. Sir John pointed.

A figure, with wide shoulders and tousled hair, was wheeling a barrow load of manure along a pathway that ran to the left of the Rockery.

"See that young man with the barrow?"

She nodded, more mystified than ever.

"Well, that's the 'damn fool of a son.' "

She stared at the disappearing figure, and then back at Sir John.

"Is this a joke?"

Lady St. Laurence remarked in her clear voice with a smile on her face:

"You shall meet him, my dear, if you care to stay to dinner."

## CHAPTER XIX

MICHAEL stood up.

He went slowly across to the window and stared into the dimness of the garden. In his evening clothes the physical hardness and tanned face that gardening had given him were emphasised.

At dinner it had been borne upon Thornton that he was as much a member of the household, as in the garden he was one of the gardeners. Lady St. Laurence and Sir John plainly accepted him for what he was, one of their own breed and standing—the Michael St. Helier of perfect manners and easy bearing Thornton had met the year before on board ship.

He had been highly amused when he heard of the incident on the terrace which Sir John had insisted on the young huntswoman, who had stayed to dinner, relating herself. Michael had chatted freely with her, but his manner with Gabrielle had been noticeably restrained throughout; he had avoided as far as possible addressing her directly, at least Thornton had received that impression. It had set him wondering again.

Gabrielle had said nothing further on the matter of Michael's "attitude" when alone with the monk, showing him round the old Elizabethan house after tea; he had been highly interested in seeing everything, the stately rooms with their sculptured ceilings, the carven oak staircases, Hollingham's chapel and "priest's hiding-hole."

After dinner, in the drawing-room, they had played cards, and then Lady St. Laurence with her kindly tact had whispered to Thornton, "You and Michael will want to be by yourselves." She had taken them to this homely little study, placed at the monk's disposal for his stay. A fire burning, decanter of whiskey and syphon, shelves of books, papers and periodicals, everything a man could desire.

That had been half an hour ago. For a time Michael had questioned him eagerly on his doings since the days in New Zealand, until a certain restlessness had appeared, and Thornton guessed that that "something about Gabrielle" was coming...

Michael turned from the window:

"Have a drink, Padre?"

He mixed one for the monk, and another for himself.

"I told you there was something I couldn't write about."

"In your letter. Yes, I remember."

Michael sat down facing him. He lit a cigarette, hesitating as to how to begin.

"You may have forgotten, but you once asked me—it was on board when I told you I wanted to be a gardener—you asked whether I looked upon it as a kind of vocation."

"I believe I did."

"Well, I do... At least, I did."

He hesitated again.

"I don't mean that I've changed my mind. I told you in my letter that I'd everything I wanted in this world. And I have—as far as the gardening's concerned, and being at Hollingham and all that... Only I'd thought of it as a sort of dedication of oneself. When I started here I made a rule of life—Mass and Communion every morning, an hour's visit at night, acting as gardener and nothing else during the day, one or two other things. Anyway, you see?"

"Quite," said Thornton. "You're still sticking to all that?"

"Oh, yes... but I'd meant it to be a complete thing in itself, nothing interfering with it—the dedication of one's whole life."

He paused. There was a distressed look in the dark eyes, almost an appeal, as though he didn't want to continue.

"What's the trouble, Michael?"

He stubbed out the half-consumed cigarette.

"Padre, something's happened."

"Tell me."

"You'll think me an insane fool, but—it's Gabrielle."

His lips were trembling.

Thornton asked him in a matter of fact tone:

"What is it about Gabrielle?"

"I didn't know until the other day — some time before that last letter. . . ."

Thornton decided to help him out:

"You're trying to tell me, aren't you, that you're in love with Gabrielle?"

It startled Michael, put to him in plain words, and brought the crimson flooding into his cheeks. He swallowed.

"I'm sorry to embarrass you," Thornton apologised. "It's true though, isn't it?"

"But — How did you know?"

"Because, my dear young man, you're so very manifestly trying not to let her see it."

"How do you mean?"

"You scarcely speak to her, or look at her. You don't rag her, as you used to. Your entire manner to her has changed."

Michael sat there with his eyes on the floor. He looked up suddenly.

"Gabrielle's not noticed anything?" It came sharply. "I mean, she's not said anything to you?"

"She was going to say something this morning — only she checked herself."

"Not about this?"

"About you, Michael. She dislikes your present attitude to her. She didn't actually say it, but I gathered that."

"Then she has — "

"Of course she's noticed. My dear boy, Gabrielle's not blind."

"My God, Padre, I'd leave here to-morrow, if I thought she knew."

Thornton said carefully:

"I think she's hurt by the inexplicable manner you've adopted. . . . You're very thorough, you know, in your way of going about things."

He began filling his pipe, remarking as casually as he could:

"So you're in love with Gabrielle?"

"My God, I love her, Padre!"

The brown eyes were filling. He looked away. It was some time before he said more quietly:

"It was when I saw her in her home here — the way everybody regards her; the servants worship her. I think I saw her for the first time really, that self-effacing goodness. I never used to think much about her in New Zealand, all that time, and coming back on the boat . . . I just wanted to get started in this life. . . It was after Christmas."

He paused.

"Something happened?" Thornton encouraged him.

"There was a dance here, county people mostly. I ragged Gabrielle, when we were dancing together, about some man who was paying her a lot of attention. They all do, but I'd noticed him in particular. I bumped in on them by accident in the conservatory and caught something he was saying before I could get out. I heard enough to know that he was asking her to marry him. . . I think she must have turned him down, because nothing's been said of any engagement. . . It began after that. I was always thinking of her. I disliked it when he came to dinner one night later. Idiotic, I know, because he's an awfully decent person. But it opened my eyes — well, to myself. I called myself a B.F. . . . Honestly I tried like hell to crush it down. . . She came into the cottage one day when I was cooking some lunch for myself, to see me about something. I knew then. The whole thing just came upon me with a rush. I don't think she noticed anything; I pretended to be busy over the stove until I got myself in hand. . . And I've kept myself in hand rigidly ever since. It's not been easy, Padre. My God, it's not!"

He lit another cigarette. His hand was shaking. Thornton took a match-box off the table and lit his pipe.

"So that's why you can't be natural with her?"

"I daren't be — natural, if you call it that."

Thornton said simply:

"Thank you for telling me."

There was a silence. Thornton waited. Nothing further came.

"It's not a crime to be in love, Michael."

Michael stood up and leaned an elbow on the mantelpiece, passing his hand wearily over his eyes. He dropped it to declare fiercely:

"I didn't come here to fall in love with Gabrielle!"

"No, of course not. You came here to live a particular kind of life that you were determined upon."

"And I'm going to live that particular kind of life, even if it's hell!"

"It's as bad as that?"

"It's hell to see that girl day after day going about, and be just one of the gardeners."

So that was how he regarded it?

"Do you think you could sit down? I want to talk to you."

Michael obeyed.

"You feel you're bound in honour to keep it from her? Because you're a gardener?"

"Of course I do. If she had an inkling of it, I'd go. I'd have to. One of the gardeners in love with Gabrielle St. Laurence!"

Thornton considered.

"Then it's not so much the incompatibility?"

"Incompatibility?"

"You seemed to imply just now that something had happened which was not quite compatible with this—dedication of your life."

"It isn't in a sense. It's so damnably distracting from it."

"Naturally," Thornton agreed. "Michael, I asked you once if you'd ruled out the idea of marriage, and you said no."

"I know I did."

"Are you still of the same mind?"

He didn't answer.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have asked that," Thornton said. So marriage was confined to a single issue in his mind after what had happened. There was a wait. They both sat looking into the fire.

"Your sensibilities are going to get a shock, Michael."

Michael looked up uncertainly.

"A year ago you were in much the same trouble over religion, putting everything to the subjective test. Could you try and forget yourself as a gardener for a moment?"

"Sorry, no. I'm damn well remembering that."

"Then, for a change, could you damn well remember that you're Michael St. Helier, a highly eligible young man, that Gabrielle has human feelings, and that her father and mother have a sense of humour."

Michael shifted uneasily.

"Well, yes; I suppose so."

He fastened on to:

"Gabrielle? She'd have some very human feelings if a gardener —"

"Keep off the gardener, man! You weren't the gardener at dinner just now."

He retorted quickly:

"Because I've had to accommodate myself to their wishes, about dinner."

"Then, try and accommodate yourself to facts."

It arrested him.

"I don't quite know what you're driving at."

Thornton studied the bowl of his pipe, pressed down the ash with his thumb and relit it.

"Very well. Do you imagine the family see the gardening as you do? And if Gabrielle regards you as you regard yourself—I'll eat that Hollywood hat."

A glimmer of comprehension was appearing in his eyes. Thornton began drumming with his fingers on the arm of his chair.

"Work it out for yourself, Michael."

Thornton looked at his watch.

It was ten o'clock.

Michael had left him twenty minutes ago, saying that it was

his time to go to the chapel. The monk had finished his Office.

He stood up and stared at the embers in the fireplace, wondering if he had done the right thing.

Michael was passionately in love.

The thing had happened that he had longed for from the day when he had first brought them together on board ship. He had never disguised it from himself. They were so eminently fitted for one another. The same breed. The same Faith, now. Michael with his virile physique and looks, his idealistic outlook on life; Gabrielle with her loveliness of body and soul.

He hadn't dared to say more to Michael. He couldn't commit Gabrielle, however certain he was of it in his own mind. He had wondered when Gabrielle had made that proposition about Hollingham on board, but for which Michael would have gone from her life. He had been fairly sure of it in New Zealand, that last night at the Hargreaves. He had been morally certain to-day. It had been in her voice when she spoke of Michael, in the blue depths of her eyes behind the irritation over his attitude.

It was that attitude that was keeping him at a distance. He had told him she was hurt by his inexplicable manner, but left unanswered the question whether she had "noticed anything" in the sense in which Michael had meant it.

There he could only surmise.

He could have told Michael to go straight away and tell her, without the slightest doubt as to the result; Sir John's admiration for his gardener was unconcealed, as also Lady St. Laurence's affection. He himself had been here a few hours only, but he had seen sufficient. Michael might have been their son.

Still, it would have been an unwarrantable presumption. . . .

It was for Michael now.

There was nothing else for it.

Michael would have to work it out for himself.

The monk knocked the ashes from his pipe, finished his drink, smiled when he noticed that Michael had forgotten his own, and then made his way to the chapel.

Michael was kneeling in the dimness before the Tabernacle, lit only by the lamp above.

The monk genuflected and made his way to the back. He stood for a minute watching the light flickering on the walls, catching the pendants with their coats of arms. Hollingham's ancient chapel.

It came back to him.

What Gabrielle had told him that evening of this chapel.

The priest who had been caught here in penal days. A young priest in the prime of life. Trapped in the act of saying Mass. He had been handed over and tortured, and then for some reason released. A week later he had found his way back to Hollingham by night, haggard and broken from what he had endured, the hands that had held the Host, cut in furrows from some hideous device they had used. He had said Mass again the next morning with his hands bandaged except for the tips of his fingers. The pursuants had ridden up and broken in as he was giving the Blessing at the end; the release had been a trick to implicate others. He had completed the Blessing, and then raised the bandaged hands to heaven, offering his life for the Faith. They had struck him down as he stood there in the vestments of a priest of God, enraged by that quiet act of fortitude . . . on the stone steps leading up to the altar a brass was inlaid marking where his blood had flowed, and on the wall a tablet describing what had happened in this chapel; beneath it, the last words he had spoken, the Saviour's he had served unto death: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Gabrielle had shown him the brass and the tablet this evening.

He knelt down.

And found himself asking that priest to remember Michael who knelt there so still before the Tabernacle and the place where that blood had flowed.

Michael, who too was in his prime.

Who also had dedicated his life.

It came to the monk in that moment, that it was in Michael to do what that priest had done, and give his all; for the Crucified

in Whose Presence he knelt each evening, even as he was kneeling now. . . .

He was to remember that flash of intuition later.

He also asked that priest not to forget the very human Michael who loved Gabrielle, and to whom seemingly it had not occurred that Gabrielle might love a gardener.

In the morning Michael, in his gardener's clothes, served the monk's Mass, following that of the Hollingham priest. The family and Michael made their Communions as well as some of the gardeners and the staff.

In the evening, when Michael again joined Thornton in the little study, no reference was made to a certain matter. The former was in an absent-minded mood and restless. Conversation was punctuated with, "Sorry, Padre, you were saying . . . ?" Gabrielle passed by the window in the twilight outside and Michael saw her.

After which it was monosyllables.

Not a successful half-hour.

On the third evening, in the drawing-room after dinner, Gabrielle sat with them for a few minutes and then went out to see to something. Michael became silent, glancing at intervals at the door. He stood up carelessly with, "I'll have a look at the barometer, if I may." Thornton caught a glimpse of his face reddening before he got to the door. It closed on him.

Sir John leaned back and contemplated the cornice, making "Hurrumph" noises, with a smile lurking in the corners of his mouth. The married sister and her husband were arranging a card-table. Lady St. Laurence smiled: "You'd like a game, Father Thornton?" Thornton excused himself; there were letters he would have to attend to. "Perhaps Gabrielle or Michael ——" She glanced at Sir John. "Otherwise engaged," he replied drily. "The barometer, my dear, indicates you and me." She looked mystified: "The barometer?" He

rose, went over, offered his arm and led her courteously to the card-table.

Thornton left them.

In the hall he consulted the barometer, tapping on the glass. The needle moved half an inch to *Set Fair*. So far no one else had consulted the barometer that evening.

On his way to the study he passed the morning-room and noticed that the door was closed; it had been open when they passed it after dinner on the way to the drawing-room.

In the study he looked at his watch and then got down to his letters. . . .

Five minutes . . .

Ten minutes . . .

Fifteen minutes . . . "Um?"

Twenty minutes . . .

He put his watch back hastily in his pocket, as he heard footsteps coming along the passage. A tap came on the door.

"Come in."

The door opened.

Gabrielle and Michael entered. They stood there hand in hand like two children; Gabrielle in her long dress of blue, Michael in his immaculate evening clothes. There was radiant happiness in their faces. Gabrielle said:

"Will you give us your blessing, Father?"

They knelt down.

He blessed them.

They stood up.

He studied them.

"Well? What's happened now?"

"Michael and I are engaged, Father."

He appeared not to have heard her aright.

"Engaged?"

"Engaged, Father."

"You said — engaged?"

"Yes, engaged, Father. We've just been telling them in the drawing-room."

He registered first perplexity, then stupefaction.

"But, Gabrielle ——"

"Yes, Father?"

"Gabrielle, Michael is a gardener."

"Gentleman-gardener," she corrected him.

He asked:

"Who proposed?"

"I did," said Michael.

Thornton regarded him gravely:

"Michael, I'm amazed at you! Congratulations!"

He held out his hands, smiling his own happiness. They took them.

"God bless you, my dears. This is glorious. I hope you'll be tremendously happy."

There were tears in the eyes of all three.

In the drawing-room there was a buzz of excitement as they entered. Footmen, liveried up to the neck with miraculous speed, were carrying in drinks. Lady St. Laurence was flitting about with, "Well, who could have believed it . . . Oh, there you are. . . My dears, we're going to drink your healths." The married sister and husband were clearing away the cards. Sir John was "hurrumphing" and clearing his throat. The spectacled secretary left him to congratulate the happy couple. "Can't understand it, Padre." Sir John indicated the two. "Come in here and announce they're engaged. Why, in my day —— What's this, champagne? Help yourself, Padre ——"

"John dear, will you propose their healths?" Lady St. Laurence interrupted.

The footmen retired into the background. Gabrielle and Michael stood there in the centre, suddenly shy. The rest gathered round with their glasses. Sir John surveyed the pair and assumed sternness:

"In my day ——"

"John, it's not your day."

"—— we asked the permission of the father before approaching the young lady ———"

"My father was dead, John."

"That so? . . . God rest his soul! . . . We're here to drink the health of my daughter Gabrielle and my future son-in-law, Michael St. Helier. Most of my gardeners carry on with the housemaids ———"

"John, really!"

"First time, if my memory serves me, that a gardener has asked the hand in marriage of a girl of the family — and damn it, he didn't ask! This young man goes out of the room to look at the barometer and, the deuce, he comes back with my daughter. Don't know what we're coming to. . . Here's to their health, and God bless 'em with long life and happiness. Kiss her, St. Helier, that's the custom."

Michael, crimson in the face, kissed Gabrielle on the cheek. Glasses were raised and their healths drunk.

"Are the servants out there? Come in."

A long file of servants, hastily adjusting caps and aprons, filed in behind the housekeeper. They shook hands, one by one, first with Gabrielle then with Michael, saying, "God bless you with long life and happiness," then curtseying and edging their way out.

The housekeeper, privileged, remained in the room and was given a glass of champagne. "Your best health, Miss Gabrielle." "Your best health, Mr. Michael." Lady St. Laurence drew her aside and engaged her in conversation. There was a lull in the buzz of voices. The housekeeper's comment came distinctly: "And weren't we all of us surprised. Who'd have thought it! Of course it's not as if he was a real gardener, m'Lady."

Michael raised his eyes beseechingly to heaven.

Thornton, back again in the study, finished his letters. He put the last one into an envelope and addressed it. Then laid down his pen.

He cupped his chin in his hands, smiling thoughtfully.  
Michael and Gabrielle.

Through the open window shrubs and trees were still visible in the deepening dusk with a silveriness about them from the moon. He switched off the reading-lamp above him. The garden stood out more distinctly. It was very still, not a leaf stirring. The great cedar with its outstretched arms. That deep quiet. The peace of Hollingham.

A movement caught his eye. It was on the centre path down to the Rockery. He could see two figures, walking hand in hand like children. They stopped and turned facing each other. Gabrielle placed her arms round Michael's neck, and Michael laid his hands on her shoulders. For a while they stood like that. Then Michael's head bent and she raised her lips. . .

When, at ten o'clock, he went into the chapel, Michael was kneeling there with Gabrielle by his side.

In the morning they made their Communions together.

The dedication of her life with his.

Michael had worked it out for himself.

After breakfast which Michael had with them in virtue of the day-off upon which Sir John had been adamant, Gabrielle said firmly:

"Padre, you're riding with us."

He pointed out the hopeless impropriety of it under the circumstances.

"Don't argue, Padre," Michael was equally firm.

"I thought you two were engaged."

"And whose fault is that?" Gabrielle remarked.

Thornton maintained a look of bland incomprehension.

More ceremonial.

Outside the stables the gardeners were assembled. Grooms were holding in three restive horses, saddled and bridled and jingling.

As the three of them approached, the head-gardener came forward, cap in hand:

"Speaking for the gardeners, Miss, it's welcome news we've 'eard this morning. Thought we'd like to wish you and Mr. Michael every 'appiness."

"Thank you very much, Williams," said Gabrielle.

"Thanks, mate," said Michael.

Williams grinned, and shook hands with them in turn. The other gardeners came forward and did the same.

"We're 'oping we won't lose you from the garden, sir; though it ain't as if you was one of us."

Michael sighed, and fixed Williams with his eye:

"Williams, if you say that again, there'll be a murder in the garden. Thanks, all the same, *mate*."

"Must 'ave 'is little joke, Miss."

Michael groaned.

Williams hesitated, appraising them admiringly:

"If you'll excuse me, Miss — make a fine pair, you and Mr. Michael."

They did. Gabrielle in her riding-dress, Michael in an extremely smart pair of breeches and waisted check coat. Gabrielle took Michael's hand and they bowed.

"Got up for the day, Williams," Michael explained apologetically. Thornton came forward from where he was running his hand over a glossy skin, and stood between them:

"Got up for the day." He was wearing borrowed riding-breeches and the Hollywood hat. Williams appraised him in turn:

"Very nice, Father. If I may say so, I like the 'at."

Michael said slowly and fervently:

"The murder will be to-morrow, Williams."

They mounted, the grooms wishing them all happiness, hoofs scattering the gravel to be off. There was a commotion of champing and snorting. A cheer from the gardeners started their mounts curveting towards the drive. Gabrielle and Michael raised their crops in acknowledgment.

They were off.

## CHAPTER XX

THE SHADOW moving slowly and inexorably over 1939 and the lives of millions, touched Hollingham on the last evening of Thornton's stay, during the formal dinner-party customary to the betrothal of a St. Laurence.

Sir John introduced him to General Stanton-Wayne in the lounge amidst a subdued bustle of sherries and cocktails and the well-modulated voices of the county, whilst Gabrielle and Michael were receiving congratulations. The General had been present, it seemed, at a meeting two weeks before in the Queen's Hall, London, at which the monk had spoken, shortly after his return to England.

"I was interested in something you said, Padre."

Thornton smiled questioningly.

"Diplomacy and compromise are futile, all human endeavour to avert war is folly, no statesmanship can avail for security, whilst Governments dispense with the Author of all moral law. We cry peace, when there is no peace."

Thornton stared at the white-haired man before him with the hooked nose and determined mouth, amazed at this repetition word for word, and suddenly realised who it was. He had read his book; it lay in fact on the table in the study — that outspoken indictment by General Stanton-Wayne. The Press had turned him down for an alarmist.

"I understand why you were interested," he said. "We've the same convictions? I know your book."

The other smiled:

"I'm not of your religion, Padre; but I thanked God for a priest with the courage to speak the unvarnished truth ——"

"Dinner is served, m'Lady."

There was a sudden hush.

"Would you take me in, Father Thornton?"

He turned at Lady St. Laurence's voice, came back to earth, bowed and gave her his arm.

"Your partner, General."

The General gave his arm likewise to the lady assigned to him. Two liveried footmen stood with inclined heads on either side of the door as they passed through, and a long procession of partnered men and women wended its dignified way to the dining-room. The monk liked this courtly Victorianism Hollingham retained, unchanged with the passing of the years.

In the candle-lit dining-room there was an interval whilst the guests found the cards marking their places. Gabrielle and Michael were together in the centre of the table, whose usual length had been doubled. Thornton found himself on the right of Lady St. Laurence. There was a silence. They stood there, two long lines of white shirt-fronts and flowing dresses. Lady St. Laurence inclined to him. The occasion, he decided, merited Latin:

*"Benedic, Domine, nos et haec tua dona . . ."*

A rustle of chairs, people seating themselves, and footmen handing the *hors d'oevres* . . .

With dessert the healths of Gabrielle and Michael were drunk. Gabrielle rose and said simply: "Thank you very much for your kindness to myself and the man I love." Michael stood up with: "Thank you for your kindness to myself and the woman I love."

The gentle hum of conversation was resumed.

Shortly, Lady St. Laurence rose and bowed to Sir John at the other end of the table, who responded in like manner.

"Shall we retire?"

They all stood. The footmen drew back the chairs and then stood inclined by the door. Lady St. Laurence led the way out followed by the members of her sex. The men resumed their seats.

Cigars and cigarettes were handed. The port went round.  
"Hear you got a wigging in the press, Wayne."

General Stanton-Wayne smiled at Sir John, blew out a match and inhaled his cigarette. He said nothing however.

"That book of yours, eh?"

"The press, I should say, was complimentary," the General replied enigmatically.

"Complimentary? Not what I heard. You read that scurilous publication, Padre?"

Thornton said he had, and had enjoyed the scurrility. Sir John admitted to having read every word himself with delight. He turned again to the General and asked what he meant by "complimentary." The latter looked doubtfully at the faces about him. A humourous-looking man in glasses, whom Thornton learned afterwards was secretary to a member of the Cabinet, leaned forward:

"You can talk, General. This is not Army G.H.Q."

General Stanton-Wayne laughed at the hit.

"No. But some of you ——"

"Get into your canter, Wayne," Sir John cut in. "Nobody here'll object."

The General shrugged:

"Your blood be on your own heads, then."

There was an immediate atmosphere of expectancy, revealing their interest in this retired Army man who had stirred up a hornet's nest.

"I said 'complimentary,'" he looked at Sir John, "because the press almost to a paper deliberately ignored the one thing in the book that mattered, and by doing so admitted its truth."

Somebody, who evidently had not read it, asked to what he was referring. Instead of answering him General Stanton-Wayne asked Thornton whether he could do so.

"Certainly," the monk replied. "You examined the factors which led to the situation previous to Munich, and showed, on evidence, that precisely the same factors were still present, and that war was as imminent as then. I'd call that your thesis."

The General thanked him for an accurate summary, then looked round him:

"I don't know whether you've studied press methods. If you

have, you'll know that the policy of silence is adopted when something is said or written for which the public are not in the mood, or supposed by the press not to be."

He was speaking slowly, weighing his words.

"I could have gone further than I did in that book, if I had been writing to produce a sensation. I was not. I was putting down sober facts for ordinarily intelligent people to consider, including some astoundingly short-sighted M.P.s." He glanced at the secretary who had asked him to "talk," sipped his port and sat back. Sir John, who had been listening closely, said:

"Wayne, what's your opinion of things at the moment?"

"Does that matter? We're concerned with facts."

He was like his book, Thornton decided, concerned solely with the actualities of things.

"You could have gone further?" the secretary prompted.

"It's not always wise to go further," came rather sharply. He regarded Thornton: "You were wise enough not to go further the other night, Padre, if it's not impertinence on my part to say so." He explained to them that he had listened to Father Thornton at the Queen's Hall. Eyes turned in the direction of the monk, who had suddenly become aware of Michael sitting silent in his place inhaling his cigarette rather rapidly.

"Possibly," he answered, "I've learned that there's no such thing as the logic of events."

"Rather too cryptic," the secretary commented. Thornton said, with his eye on Michael:

"There's no infallible rule by which situations work out. Unforeseen happenings, miracles, anything can intervene."

"Meaning," said the secretary, "that you've reached the same conclusion as the General? Leaving out the unforeseen?"

He was sharp, this person.

"Perhaps. With my own very limited powers of judgment."

General Stanton-Wayne showed his keen perception, observing: "If the Padre were to intrude religion into this, he'd remind us that one of the unforeseen happenings would be the nations on their knees before Almighty God. On the other hand he'd admit that there's no sign so far either of our statesmen calling

Almighty God into their counsels, or of the masses turning to the supernatural; and therefore, in the human order of things, he could see nothing to avert what we're heading for. Isn't that about it, Padre?"

Thornton admitted that was so, uncomfortably conscious of Michael opposite and the cigarette trembling in his fingers. General Stanton-Wayne however was oblivious of Michael St. Helier.

"You've successfully evaded giving your own opinion, General," came from the secretary. He assured him half-humourously: "I'll not hand it to my chief."

General Stanton-Wayne stubbed out his cigarette and then rested his chin on his hands:

"I've no opinion," he said quietly. "But, if you want my unalterable conviction ——"

There was dead silence. He looked the secretary in the eyes, and then said slowly and in the same quiet voice:

"England will be at war before the year's out."

There was a sudden movement. Michael had risen, an angry glint in his eyes. He muttered something in the direction of Sir John, pushed his chair back, and straightway walked out of the room.

Thorton looked at his watch.

There was half an hour yet before the car would take him to the station. A manservant had packed his bag and gone off with it. He looked out of the study window; he would have to find Michael, working in the garden somewhere, and say good-bye.

Michael had served his Mass as usual this morning; he had been in the chapel at midnight after the guests had left. Everything quite normal again, after that embarrassing exit from the dining-room.

Mercifully it had happened so quickly as to leave them merely sitting there mystified. Sir John had stared at the door, as it closed: "St. Helier unwell, or what?" He had looked anxious

for a moment. Thornton had assured him that St. Helier would be all right in a few minutes; he was hypersensitive on the matter of war. The others with their well-bred decorum had smiled understandingly, one of them remarking, "Oh well, we're all of us hypersensitive on something." Conversation had been resumed. Thornton had caught Sir John's eye, excused himself, and slipped out.

He had found Michael where his instinct had told him he would be, in the little study — pacing up and down.

"Pull yourself together, man. No harm done."

Michael had wheeled round fiercely:

"Why the hell couldn't they keep off all that!"

"Hang it all, Michael, you can't expect them to keep off what's in everybody's mind."

"It's that cold-blooded — I'm the only one amongst them who'd be conscripted!"

"Michael, we can't argue. You've got to be in the drawing-room and behave like a normal human being. And you'll not, if you don't cool down."

It had steadied him. He had sat down wearily.

"What have I got to do now? Apologise?"

"No need to. I've told them you're over-sensitive on the matter. Say something to Sir John, if you like. . . And stop studying the carpet, man. Anyone can lose his temper."

"Gabrielle mustn't know of this."

"She won't. I'll see to that. Stroll into the drawing-room as if nothing whatever had happened."

Thornton had returned to the dining-room, and whispered something to Sir John. The host had looked round at his guests: "I take it we've all forgotten that little incident. . . The ladies'll be expecting us, what?"

In the drawing-room they had found them facing the grand piano, at which a professional singer from London was standing, chatting to her accompanist already seated in readiness. Michael had come in, frowning slightly but looking himself again. He had gone and sat by Gabrielle's side. She had put out her hand and pressed his own.

The opening chords of a glorious song had rung out, and then a voice of perfect natural quality. Thornton had leaned back and closed his eyes. Behind the haunting music of its melody there had dinned discordantly in his brain:

"I'm the only one amongst them who'd be conscripted" . . .

"Nothing would make me kill" . . .

"England will be at war before the year's out" . . .

He picked up his pipe and tobacco pouch, pushed them into his pocket, and then went out into the garden.

For a moment he stood on the terrace, taking in the fresh beauty of the morning, the lawns still glistening with the early dew, a myriad diamonds catching the sun; the great cedar, its branches swaying to a light breeze; beyond the Rockery the sweep of the park, the oaks that had guarded Hollingham for centuries . . .

He went down the pathway to the Rockery. Michael's flower-beds were a blaze of colour, fuller than a week ago. He went up the steps and stood for a moment watching a figure engaged in pruning rose-trees.

"I envy you, Michael."

Michael turned.

"Hullo, Padre . . . I know, it is rather glorious."

That light of devotion was in his eyes that Thornton had noticed when he was gardening. He loved it. It was his life.

"See that little beggar?" Michael pointed. He hadn't seen it — a squirrel sitting on its haunches unperturbed, a couple of yards away.

"Comes into the cottage for lunch."

Thornton held out his hand to it. The squirrel put its head on one side; the hand wasn't familiar somehow. Michael stooped down and tickled its nose with his finger:

"Hullo, mate."

Thornton watched. There was a lump in his throat.

"I'll have to be saying good-bye."

Michael stood up:

"Damn it all, you've only just arrived."

There was a sudden wistfulness in his look. More than wistfulness. Something hesitant, that he wanted to say. Thornton took out his watch, looked at it, and put it back in his pocket slowly — to give him time.

"What is it, Michael?"

"That chap, Stanton-Wayne — did he mean all that?"

Thornton wished it hadn't come. He answered:

"I'm afraid he did. Yes."

"You seemed to be more or less agreed with him?"

"I couldn't honestly disagree."

Michael put it directly:

"Then you think — war will come?"

"I can see nothing to prevent war coming, as things are. But I'm not infallible. Neither is General Stanton-Wayne."

He waited. Nothing more came.

"Michael, you've God, and your Gabrielle, and your garden."

The other looked away, swallowing. There was another wait.

"It's not my own views on war, Padre. It's more than that."

"Oh?"

"I told you once I could never kill."

"I know you did."

"And I can't. Whatever happens. You understand that, don't you," came tensely.

"I know you can't. And I know that nothing could make you kill."

Thornton saw it hovering on his lips.

"Shall we leave it at that?"

He was not going to interfere with Michael's conscience.

"Very well, Padre."

Thornton held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Michael."

The other wiped his hand on his trousers and took the monk's.

"Padre, I'm tremendously grateful — You know what I mean."

"Forget it."

The monk smiled:

"Good-bye, gardener."

He went down the steps.

Half way up the path he turned. Michael was standing there watching him, a robin perched on his shoulder. . .

On the steps of the front entrance, five minutes later, he was saying good-bye to the others.

"Queer business altogether," from Sir John. "You come down here, Padre; daughter engaged three days later. Getting down my unmarried daughter from Scotland next time." "John, really!" from Lady St. Laurence. "Yes, you've only to send a telegram, Father Thornton."

Gabrielle went down the steps with him to the car.

"Padre, you've been an absolute dear. . . Michael, I mean."

"God bless you both. Good-bye."

The footman, holding open the door, inclined as he stepped in.

There was a gentle purring.

He waved to the group on the steps.

The car slid away down the drive.

Smooth, grey-green trunks; the Beech Avenue.

The great wrought-iron gates, griffins surmounting them defiantly, keeping the peace of Hollingham.

Michael and Gabrielle.

## CHAPTER XXI

I AM SPEAKING to you from the Cabinet Room at 10, Downing Street. . . This country is at war with Germany. . . I know you will all play your parts with calmness and courage. . . Now, may God bless you all. May He defend the right. It is evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution—and against them I am certain that the right will prevail."

The Prime Minister's voice ceased.

Someone switched off.

There was silence. The eyes of some of them met, but no one spoke.

The Abbot stood up and for a while gazed through the window. Outside, pigeons were flying about unconcernedly. The dome of St. Paul's could be seen away to the right.

The Abbot turned. Thornton saw the inexpressible sadness in the calm face, all the pathos of what lay ahead; for the Abbot knew war and what it meant. His eyes wandered over the dark-robed figures standing in groups about the Common Room. Some of the younger of them were still looking incredulous. They had never known war or what it meant.

"This country is at war with Germany," the Abbot repeated the Prime Minister's words. He told them quietly that, with the exception of the Chapel and Refectory, the ground floor and basements would from now onwards be in the hands of the A.R.P.; the usual permissions the Rule required would be in abeyance in the event of and during air-raids for those of them to whom White Cross A.R.P. armlets had been issued; they knew their instructions and would carry them out.

The Abbot walked slowly down the room. One of the monks opened the door for him. They followed in double file down the stairs, and along the length of the corridor to

the chapel. There was a rustle as they genuflected and knelt down, each in his own place.

The Abbot began the Litanies.

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

The sirens came, wailing hideously. Some of them rose, genuflected and went out.

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

"*Ora pro nobis*" . . .

England was at war with Germany.

## CHAPTER XXII

ON A DAY at the end of November, 1940, Thornton, in his cell at the monastery, sat wading through an accumulation of letters. The last few weeks had not been conducive to correspondence or to any kind of routine work whatever. He had been too dog-tired to attend to the relatively unimportant.

He slit open the last of the letters, read its contents and dropped it on the desk before him. A lady, in the safety of Cumberland, wanted him to look in at a Bayswater Police-station and find out whether anything had been looted from her house in Palace Gardens. He felt inclined to write back, "I find a Wedgwood cup is missing. Would you like Scotland Yard to take it up?"

The monk sat back.

He surveyed the heap of plaster that had been brushed up into a corner temporarily. In the window two of the panes were of cardboard instead of glass; others were cracked. A nearby bomb, he understood from the lay-brother downstairs.

He had returned here this morning. There was a lull now in the Battle of London. For weeks he had been working by night in the hospital a few streets away from the monastery, with the full intensity of the bombing raging round, incendiaries, landmines, all doing their hideous work. Casualties coming in endlessly, and as often as not women and children; torn, crushed by masonry, limbless—as heartrending for the doctors and nurses as himself. Many dead by the time the ambulances reached the hospital. The wards packed with injured and dying, some in agony—all victims of the colossal insanity; his one consolation the administration of the Sacraments to the Catholics amongst them and what spiritual help he could give to those who were not of the Faith.

It was the fortitude of these people of London that amazed

him; their self-sacrifice for others amidst the horror. These ordinary men and women who risked their all, and often gave it—Firemen, A.R.P., death-stalked by day and night; the Demolition Squads working feverishly in the blackness, digging with their hands through the debris for some crushed human shape. Hundreds of them killed. Unknown warriors who gave their lives in their prime that a bed-ridden woman, a helpless child, might live.

God reward them! And He would.

The doctors and nurses at the hospital were the same. Patient, not caring for themselves but the victims, tired-eyed, worn with fatigue.

He had become almost one of the staff there. They had been interested to find that he was a qualified surgeon who had served as Medical Officer in the last war. They had admitted him to operations. He had watched modern methods in the Theatre, unknown twenty years before. They had gone out of their way to give him every facility for his own work. They were of fine stuff, those ordinary doctors and nurses of the staff.

It was the physical weariness of it all that had been difficult. Night upon night. Sunset to dawn. Week after week. The endless whine of the bomb, impact of explosion and blast. That nerve-straining wait for a direct hit. Thank God, it had never come. Only a wing of the great building a bit shattered. Windows, of course, galore.

Every dawn, with that blessed All Clear, he had climbed the stairs to the flat roof above for fresh air, and stood looking at red glows and smoke rising, wondering how much of London would be left; then gone to the room they had given him, lain down dressed, and dropped off into dreamless oblivion.

The Blitz had eased off a little. Then markedly. There was a definite lull in the onslaught from the skies.

The monastery so far had escaped. He had examined it from outside on his return this morning. The stone of its walls chipped from flying splinters, windows smashed, but nothing more. The A.R.P. Station below had become a

hive of activity, seething with first-aid orderlies and nurses.

Their numbers were fewer in the House, some of the younger monks now being chaplains in the Forces.

His eye caught the dome of St. Paul's visible through the window, serene and peaceful, above the battered city. One of the things that stood for England's peace.

Like Hollingham.

Hollingham stood for England's peace.

He felt a sudden yearning for Hollingham, away from the turbulence and slaughter.

It reminded him. He hadn't answered Michael's last letter. Partly because he was doubtful of what to say.

When a man tells you he's going to do something, of which you may not approve, and about which you're to ask no questions —

Where was that letter of Michael's? He had read it in a dead-tired condition yesterday, and might have misunderstood. He searched his pockets without success; went and opened his bag, found some papers and the letter amongst them. He sat down again, and unfolded it. It was written from Hollingham:

"Dear Padre,

"Everything as usual here. One bomb in the Park the other night, otherwise no trouble.

"Padre, I'm going to do a thing that might appear a bit inconsistent, although it won't be. There was an Air Force person here to dinner the other night, and he talked pretty freely about things, in a callous, brutal kind of way—operational bombing in particular. I needn't tell you I hated it, and had to hold myself in like hell. It's not the men who do it, they're under orders; though they must loathe it at times themselves. It's the hideousness of what they're ordered to do. However.

"All I can tell you is this. I am not remaining any longer under 'Reserved occupations.' I've made my decision, though I am not going to let you know what it is, because I don't want to involve you in something of which you might not approve.

Please, Padre, don't ask me any questions. I'm trying to do the right thing as I see it. Just pray for me. It's not easy, because it means that Gabrielle and I will not get married yet.

"You must have been going through hell at your hospital lately. All my sympathy. Oh, my God, why all this unspeakable vileness!"

Yrs affectionately,  
Michael."

Thornton put the letter down.

"I've made my decision"?

What decision?

He was not going to remain under "Reserved occupations." That meant he was no longer staying on as gardener at Hollingham. Sir John had been allowed to retain two gardeners only, and had chosen Michael and Williams. The two of them had been appointed by the Ministry of Food, or some Ministry, to take charge of food production in the Hollingham area. He had gathered, when at Hollingham for a couple of days, that it had been highly successful; so that it was unlikely that the Ministry had to do with Michael's decision.

From the tone of the letter, it was clearly Michael's own choice.

No questions to be asked.

"I'm trying to do the right thing."

Presumably, a young man of twenty-two no longer under "Reserved occupations" would be conscripted for one of the Services. He had put in that bit about the Air Force person and operational bombing. Why, unless it had to do with his decision?

The R.A.F.?

But Michael in the R.A.F. didn't make sense... "They could conscript me, but nothing would make me kill" . . .

Thornton picked up the letter again, and read it for the third time.

Something of which he might not approve?

Of one thing he was certain, Michael would not be carried away by some sudden wild idea; he was not that somewhat unstable young man of two years ago. He had made this decision deliberately and even reluctantly; "It's not easy, because it means that Gabrielle and I will not get married yet." He was equally certain Michael would do nothing without first making up his conscience on it.

Very well.

He was not to know.

Different from Dunkirk. He had heard all about Dunkirk from Michael, even if he had had to read a good deal between the lines — for one thing that Michael had anything but lacked the physical courage for it. Gabrielle had written at the time, excitedly.

The main facts he had gathered were these:

Michael had never driven a motor-boat in his life; that however had not deterred him. He and a man named Trevors from Guildford had driven by car to Dover in answer to that urgent appeal: "Save the men; save the men!" The motor-boat at Dover which belonged to Trevors was not in too seaworthy a condition. They had succeeded in trimming her up sufficiently for the miraculously calm sea, and then got going for Dunkirk, Michael picking up the driving of her on the way, to be able to take over when necessary. They had been one in a never-ending stream of dinghies, motor-boats, rowing-boats, pleasure steamers, life-boats and merchant ships — many of them never to return. Nearing Dunkirk they had found the British warships in action, hampered by German U-boats continually breaking surface and opening fire. They had gone straight ahead, shells whistling over, for the beaches of Dunkirk now in sight. They could see dark masses that were our men, waves of German planes raining down bombs and shrapnel mercilessly, the British fighters swooping to bring them down. Next they were under bombing themselves. There were hospital ships receiving terrible attention, black heads of men in the water all round hoping somehow to get on board. It was heads everywhere as they came in close to the beaches.

Their job had begun.

They had pulled as many aboard the motor-boat as she would carry, some in a pathetic state of exhaustion. Michael had taken over the driving, Trevors attending to their load. He had turned her, and then let her out for all she was worth. On his right a hospital ship received a direct hit whilst they were passing ("That was my worst moment, Padre"). Michael had had a glimpse of horrid ghastliness, heads and limbs strewing the water. He didn't know that a flying splinter had ripped his own forehead until the blood was running into his eyes. Trevors had bandaged him quickly, and Michael had stuck to his driving; for those men needed constant attention.

They had made it, landing their men on a jetty at Dover, Michael receiving first aid attention, Trevors filling up with petrol. They had grabbed the sandwiches and coffee handed them, and set off for Dunkirk once more.

Five times they had done it, in daylight and in darkness, just one of that ceaseless stream doing the same, filling their motor-boat to capacity, unloading at Dover and returning, subsisting on sandwiches and coffee. The last return journey had been the worst. Two men had died in the boat, another in high fever raving in delirium the whole way. Michael had stripped him of the wet remnants of his clothes, taken off his own and managed to get him into them (Thornton had learned that from Gabrielle).

One morning early a car had driven up to Hollingham. Trevors had helped out a white-faced, hollow-eyed Michael with a bandaged forehead, in an overcoat and little else, chattering rather wildly from exhaustion. They had got him upstairs to bed and phoned a doctor. It was mainly lack of sleep and the head wound going septic that had played him out.

Thornton had received a full description a few days later, Michael apparently none the worse for his experience. The letter had finished: "I withdraw what I once said to you — that there could be *nothing* thrilling about war. My God, Padre, to see those men and what they were going through! And to have a chance of doing one's bit!" There had been a

P.S., "I don't think either Trevors or myself got wind-up. If we did, it all went directly we saw those men in the sea and got down to it."

It was the incredible fortitude he had found so thrilling, and the work of saving. The rest of it must have been one long nightmare, although he hadn't said so. No hint, however, of any "panicking." It was difficult to believe this was the young man who less than three years ago, had been thrown off his balance by horrors.

He was glad Michael had had that experience.

And now Michael was going to —

What in the name of heaven *was* he going to do?

It might "appear a bit inconsistent, although it won't be"? If it was the R.A.F., as was likely, it certainly appeared inconsistent. Michael had seemed quite content with his food-production job on an occasion when he had come here to the monastery — one Sunday, not long before Dunkirk.

It was useless surmising; there was nothing definite enough to go on. And yet, plainly, it was something very definite.

Anyway . . .

It was not the first he had had to wait for Michael to divulge things.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**H**E KNEW six months later.

Michael had written at intervals, but without giving any clue as to what actually he was doing. The code address on his letters conveyed nothing except that he was with the R.A.F. in some capacity. It might be clerical work, or any of the innumerable ground-staff jobs, or "attached" jobs. The letters had been short and guarded; general remarks about the war, Hollingham, Gabrielle who was now in the A.T.S. Michael didn't like her being in the A.T.S.—women should have nothing to do with the Army.

Thornton knew on a day in July 1941.

A day of dark sky and rain.

He received a telephone call at the monastery about ten a.m. The voice at the other end informed him that it was a Wing Commander (no name given) of the R.A.F. speaking.

Thornton listened.

The Wing Commander was apologetic. He had been given Father Anselm Thornton's name as a person who might be able to help him in a difficulty. It would involve a personal interview. He couldn't say more on the telephone. Would Father Thornton be willing to come down to an R.A.F. Station and see him? It was some forty miles out of London. A car would be sent for him, and the driver would give him a pass into the Station. The matter was rather urgent. Could Father Thornton possibly work it to-day?

Thornton thought quickly. There was nothing very vital on to-day. The Wing Commander sounded as though the matter were giving him anxiety — whatever it was. He asked him to hold on for a moment.

He went to the Abbot's room, asked his permission and was given it; then returned to the telephone:

"Very well, sir. What time?"

The car would be at the monastery about twelve o'clock. The Wing Commander thanked him: "That's extremely good of you, Padre. Sorry it's such a foul day."

Thornton put back the receiver slowly.

Help him in a difficulty?

At 2 p.m. he was having lunch in the mess-room of an R.A.F. Bomber Station in the heart of the country, in the care of an officer who had been detailed to see to him; he was a fighter-pilot who talked cheerily of "good shows" and "bad shows" he had been in over Germany.

After lunch he was escorted through a maze of huts and drenching rain, and down a covered way to a door marked "Wing Commander." It was opened by an orderly. The fighter-pilot saluted and left him. Thornton went inside and took off his rain-coat. The orderly, after tapping on the door of an inner room and hearing "Come in," opened it for him to pass through. The door closed behind him.

Someone rose from a desk littered with papers, came forward and held out his hand: "I'm very grateful to you for coming, Padre." Thornton took the hand, murmuring, "Not at all." The Wing Commander indicated a chair and returned to his seat at the desk. Thornton sat down. "Have a cigarette?" Thornton took one from the case held out to him. The Wing Commander lit it for him and one for himself, and then rested his elbows on the desk, inhaling. Thornton liked the look of him — kindly grey eyes and greying hair, with a chin there was no mistake about.

"I told you I was in a difficulty, Padre. First of all, have a look at that record sheet."

Thornton took the paper handed to him.

At the head a name was typed — "Michael St. Helier" and a cipher number. Underneath were various typed notes giving the record of Michael St. Helier. Thornton studied it. It was all quite clear. Michael St. Helier had entered the R.A.F. at this Station in December of last year. He was 22 years old. His religion was R.C. He seemed to have been

on the ground-staff for a time. Next he had been given his commission. Pilot Officer. Later, passed "Fully operational." "Act of gallantry" April 17th.

"You know him, I take it?"

Thornton looked up—yes, he knew Michael St. Helier well.

The Wing Commander took back the record sheet.

"St. Helier gave me your name and phone number with extreme reluctance. I think you should know that. I wanted someone who knew him better than I do. I know who he is, of course—the son of Viscount St. Helier, about whom we'll say nothing. . . Young St. Helier's an intimate friend?"

Thornton said he was.

"At the moment he's in the guard-room, under arrest."

The cigarette that Thornton was raising to his lips remained suspended in mid-air.

"Under arrest?"

"St. Helier was briefed for a target in Germany. Two days ago, to be exact. He refused to obey operational orders."

Thornton gave himself time. Briefed for a target in Germany? Refused to obey operational orders?

"Is one allowed to ask questions, sir?"

"Certainly, Padre."

"On what grounds did St. Helier refuse to obey orders?"

The Wing Commander considered his reply.

"The Flight Commander brought St. Helier here to this room, and made his statement. I asked St. Helier if he was unwell. He said he was not. I asked him if he could give any explanation for his refusal. He answered quite calmly, 'I can't obey an order to drop bombs.' I asked him why not, and he answered, 'I can't kill. I can't kill men, or women, or children.' I asked him whether it meant he had a moral objection to bombing as such. He merely repeated, 'I can't kill men, or women, or children.' I asked him whether he had anything further to say. He had nothing. There was nothing left but to put him under arrest. I tried to question him again yesterday, but he merely reaffirmed that he had

nothing further to add. However, when I told him he was placing me in a hell of a difficult position, and asked him whether there was anyone who knew him well, he consented, as I said, with extreme reluctance, and gave me your name."

Thornton said:

"I see. Was it to be his first operational flight, I think you call it?"

The Wing Commander said that it was. "Normally he wouldn't have been briefed for this flight; he's only recently been passed fully operational. We were short of pilots. I only managed with luck to replace him for the flight."

Thornton asked:

"You told him he was placing you in a difficult position?"

A shadow appeared in the grey eyes:

"It's not pleasant, Padre, to court-martial an officer for whom one has the highest admiration. St. Helier's respected by every officer and man on the Station. I'm not referring to his ordinary conduct, which is excellent; he's taken every pains with his course, though why the devil he went through it at all, I don't know. You probably noticed something on that record sheet?" He indicated it lying on the desk.

"There's an 'Act of gallantry,' I noticed."

"Which strictly he needn't have done, because it could have cost him his life. But he did it, all the same."

"What was it?"

"It was on our own Aerodrome. Three miles from here. St. Helier was on some drill there at the time. One of our pilots crashed, taking off; and that particular crash means going up in flames when you hit. I don't know how St. Helier got him out, nobody does; the ship was the devil's own furnace. . . Anyhow, he did it, and that pilot's alive to-day, and on operational."

The Wing Commander watched the effect of it. Thornton asked after a while:

"St. Helier was all right?"

"He was damnably burnt. Face and hands. Four weeks in hospital, and back again on the job."

"Scars, of course?"

The Wing Commander took up a pencil and put it down.

"That's the curse of it, Padre. They called him A for Apollo, with those looks of his. It's B for Burns now. Says he prefers it. . . Oh, yes, he's lost his looks."

A sudden impatient gleam was in his eyes:

"And that's the man I'm to court-martial, officially."

He stood up, walked to the window, and studied the rain running down the panes. After a while he turned:

"Well, Padre?"

Thornton asked:

"Is this the first case of the kind you've had? Perhaps I oughtn't to ask that?"

"That's all right. I've had cases of men who hated the bombing like hell; but St. Helier's the first of them who's refused to go on an operational flight."

Thornton said slowly and deliberately:

"The first with the guts to take the consequences."

The Wing Commander replied rather sharply:

"If you like to put it that way. . . All the same, if you don't mind, Padre, we'll steer clear of the moral side."

Thornton said in the same deliberate tone:

"Provided you understand, sir, that my own sympathies are entirely with St. Helier's moral ideals which compel him to save a man's life at the risk of his own, to refuse to commit what he considers murder, and for which you yourself have the highest admiration."

Thornton leaned back, breathing quickly.

The Wing Commander sat down at his desk again. His fingers played about with some papers.

"I've every respect for that young man's moral ideals. Unfortunately I'm Wing Commander here and it's my duty to see that orders are obeyed and deal with cases in which they are not obeyed. I've asked you to come here, Padre, because in this particular case I'm prepared to find extenuating circumstances in order to avoid a court-martial. 'Extenuating circumstances' is a general term. I want you with your knowl-

edge of St. Helier to provide me with something that can come under this general term. I could suggest — well, that St. Helier is not quite sane in his outlook — ” He left the rest to be implied.

Thornton said:

“As a qualified medical man, who served as M.O. in the last war, may I state, sir, that St. Helier is as sane in every respect as you and I; that refusing to drop bombs does not argue against sanity, and could very well argue in favour of it. Also, the last thing St. Helier would wish would be to avoid a court-martial on some trumped up ‘extenuating circumstances.’ From my knowledge of him, he would only too gladly face a court-martial for the sake of the moral ideals for which you yourself have every respect. Forgive me speaking plainly, but we may as well understand one another.”

The Wing Commander sighed, and then sat there frowning.

“You’re not very helpful, Padre.”

There was a silence.

“Damn it all, I’m trying to do the humane thing and give the man his chance!” came angrily.

“Then he’ll fling back his chance in your face!” came equally angrily from Thornton. “If the Air Force hasn’t the decency to stand by a man like St. Helier, and let him off a crime he never morally committed, then St. Helier will be mighty well content to take it!”

The Wing Commander sat very still, looking at the desk in front of him. He drew a hand wearily over his eyes.

“You’re asking me to respect his conscience?”

“I am.”

The Wing Commander sat still again. There was a long wait. He moved at length. Thornton found a hand stretched out to him. He took it and they gripped.

“I’ll get that young man off somehow, Padre.”

His voice was shaking.

“That’s damned fine of you, sir!”

It was. He was responsible to High Command and would have to shoulder any consequences himself.

"It will mean of course that he will merely be off the strength."

Thornton said:

"Quite. I understand that."

The Wing Commander lifted the receiver from a telephone.

"Wing Commander speaking. Put me on to guard-room."

There was a wait.

"Guard-room? Admit Father Thornton. Coming now. Remain outside, sergeant."

He turned to Thornton.

"If you'll ask St. Helier why he went through with it, with that in his mind beforehand, I'll be grateful, Padre. I'll not use it against him, but it will help me personally. Come back after you've talked with him."

He pressed a button. The orderly outside tapped and opened the door. He was told to take Father Thornton to the guard-room. The orderly saluted. Thornton went out and followed him.

Outside the guard-room, a sergeant was standing to attention. He saluted as they approached, and then opened the door. Thornton went inside. The door closed behind him.

A figure in officer's uniform, whose wide shoulders Thornton recognised immediately, turned, put down a book he was reading and stood up. They regarded one another. Michael held out his left hand.

Thornton took it.

"I sort of knew you'd be coming along, Padre."

His voice was singularly calm; he showed no surprise.

"You didn't mind, did you? I more or less had to give somebody's name."

Thornton said:

"I'm grateful to you for doing it, Michael."

He took off his raincoat and hung it over a chair. He was

trying not to notice Michael's face. He hadn't been quite prepared for this; for a moment he had found it almost unrecognisable. The eyes were Michael's, the dark brown depths of them as expressive as ever; but the rest was one great scar. Tight lines of skin drawn into knots; the left corner of his mouth pulled down and giving a drooped look to the cheek. There was a straight scar of three inches across the forehead.

"I know, Padre. Not quite so beautiful." Michael smiled, reading his thoughts; the crinkles of skin assumed angles. Thornton struggled with the pathos of it tugging at his heart. To express pity would only make it worse for him. He fought down his feelings.

"How much do you know, Padre?"

"Everything," he replied.

"The Wing Commander's told you?"

Thornton nodded.

"You've just come from him, haven't you?"

"This moment."

He wanted to keep him off that for a minute.

"Come here, Michael, by the window."

Michael did so.

"No objection?"

"None at all."

Thornton examined the face held up to the light, the surgeon in him alert. He passed his fingers over the skin in two or three places. Michael winced each time. The nerves were there all right, and alive.

"Of course, if you *will* pull people out of furnaces . . ."

"Nothing else to do."

He touched the straight scar on the forehead:

"That's Dunkirk, I imagine?"

Michael nodded:

"Dunkirk's all right again."

"Why do you keep that right hand behind your back?"

"Habit, I suppose."

"Hold it up."

"Yes, Dr. Thornton."

He did so. Thornton examined the hand too. It was mainly tightly stretched skin and knotted scars, with the bones almost showing in places.

"What did they say to you at the hospital?"

"Oh, vague. Something might be done about it later. I can use the hand, you know."

Thornton looked at the left one. It was not so bad. He took the right and without warning drew his knuckles firmly across the back. The other winced sharply.

"Sorry, Michael. I'm glad it hurt, though."

It meant the nerves were unharmed.

He studied the face again; then began moving the skin between the lines gently. This went on for a minute or two.

"Sit down, Michael."

Thornton handed him his cigarette-case.

"You're allowed to smoke?"

"Yes, I'm allowed that."

They lit up.

Thornton found a chair and sat down too.

"Listen, Michael. That face and those hands needn't stay like that. There'll be tissue growing up. They're making tissue now. I'm going to get you later on to a man in London; the visiting surgeon at our hospital — the one I work at. He'll get rid of most of it — the scars and lines — when there's enough tissue underneath. They've a process for it now. See?"

"Kind of iron out the old face?"

"That's the idea."

Michael hadn't lost his sense of humour, thank God.

"It's decent of you, Padre, to take all this trouble."

"Not at all. You've got to have a face for Gabrielle to kiss."

Michael smiled whimsically, with that pitiable screwing up of the crinkles. There was a pause. Then he said:

"What's going to happen, Padre?"

Thornton said in as matter of fact tone as he could:

"I've talked it out with the Wing Commander. You'll merely be off the strength."

The other considered the statement.

"That means there'll not be a court-martial?"

His tone was dispassionate.

"He's going to get you off."

"There's nothing to get me off."

"Of course there isn't."

Michael stared.

"Then you think I did the right thing?"

"I think you did a magnificent thing."

The relief of it showed in his eyes.

"I didn't know what on earth you'd think."

A shadow appeared.

"I'll have to tell Gabrielle some time, I suppose."

"I'd leave that at present."

Gabrielle in the A.T.S. War fever at its height. The present was hardly opportune.

"Michael, could you bring yourself to tell me why you ever joined the R.A.F.?"

The other hesitated.

"If I do, will you take it that I've no intention of shielding myself?"

"I will."

So that was why he had refused to say more to the Wing Commander.

"I said something about an Air Force person who came to dinner at Hollingham. Do you remember?"

"I remember you telling me in a letter. He got on your nerves, I gathered."

"I loathed the things he said. And that's putting it mildly." There was a gleam in his eyes. "He regarded the bombing of cities much the same as a butcher'd regard a slaughter house. We'd win the war with bombing, and cranks who aired their objections to it on moral grounds ought to be interned for the duration; it was bad for the morale of the Air Force. Every damned city in Germany should be wiped out. He was arguing with Sir John about some article that had appeared in a paper."

"I see."

"I managed to hold myself in during dinner, but I got him alone in the hall afterwards. I asked whether he was a married man. He said he had a wife and children. I asked him whether he'd mind a crank objecting to his wife and children being wiped out. He didn't like it, and said it was the sort of argument a crank would use. I told him I was the crank who objected. He began laughing in that irritating way some people have when they've not got an answer, and told me to join the Air Force, they'd soon cure me of crank notions. He knew I was under 'Reserved occupations.'"

Michael's eyes met Thornton's.

"Padre, I'd more or less made up my mind already; Sir John was getting a bit doubtful about keeping me under 'Reserved.' That laughing settled it. I told him, 'Laugh this one off. I'm going to.'"

Michael stopped. He relit his cigarette that had gone out. The patter of rain on the roof was audible. Thornton shifted his position:

"Yes?"

"That's about all there is to tell. I told Sir John I wanted my release from 'Reserved,' but nothing more. There was no difficulty about that. The rest was — well, routine. They put me through the tests. I was A1 in all of them. There was some time on the ground staff before I got a commission. And —— well, you probably know the rest of it from the Wing Commander?"

Thornton asked:

"They know at Hollingham that you're in the Air Force?"  
Gabrielle certainly knew it because she had written to him about it, mystified.

"They know that. Oh yes."

"And nothing more?"

"I could tell them nothing more."

Thornton considered.

"Then you'd made up your mind beforehand that you'd go through with everything until it came to operational flights?"

"That's right, Padre."

"It didn't seem inconsistent?"

"No. I could see nothing inconsistent about it, until it came to the point of an order I couldn't obey."

Thornton looked at his watch and stood up. He could see it now. Michael had simply been himself all through. When he did a thing, there were no half measures. He couldn't do it any other way, whether it were gardening or showing his detestation of bombing. He had decided on this and then gone through with it—to the bitter end, prepared to take the full consequences.

"You don't mind my mentioning what you've told me, to the Wing Commander?"

Michael was on his guard instantly:

"Why?"

"Because it'll make it easier for him personally. I think you owe it to him not to leave him in the dark."

Michael looked hesitant.

"He must understand that I'm pleading no excuses for myself."

"I promise to make that perfectly clear to him."

"Very well, Padre."

Thornton walked across to Michael and put his hands on his shoulders:

"Your Wing Commander's taken this magnificently, Michael."

"I know. He's been so damnably decent. I hated hurting him."

There was a pause.

"I suppose in a day or two you'll be leaving. What are you going to do?"

Michael frowned perplexedly.

"I've had no time to think yet. I've been expecting a court-martial. . . I don't know. . . I can't very well go back to Holliingham."

"I shouldn't attempt that. Sir John wouldn't understand."

I'd get into something else, as soon as you can. That right hand's fairly serviceable?"

"I can do most things with it. It's improving every day."

Thornton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"If I could tell the Wing Commander —— What about the N.F.S.? No killing in that."

Michael weighed the suggestion.

"Fireman? Yes? . . . Yes, I'd rather like that, Padre."

"Can I say you would?"

"Very well . . . Yes, Padre, tell him. You mean —— "

"He could work it, I expect, so that you transfer from one Service to another. You've been damaged and all that. . . Will you leave it to me, Michael?"

"All right. . . I say, Padre, I'm awfully grateful —— "

"Say it when you're on the business end of a hose."

Thornton picked up his raincoat and put it on.

"Good-bye, Michael."

He took the left hand held out to him.

Michael's eyes were suddenly brimming.

Thornton turned and went to the door.

It was almost more than he could bear to see him like that.

The strain of what he had been through . . .

The human tragedy of the looks he had lost . . .

Alone, in a guard-room . . .

## CHAPTER XXIV

**T**HE PEACE of Hollingham.

Thornton leaned back in the deck-chair he had placed in the sun on the stone paving at the foot of the Rockery. He could see the spread of the gardens from here, the green lawns and tubs with their boxes, the borders with their late summer flowers — snap-dragons, petunias, nemesia; the taller yellow helenium, hollyhocks taller again. There were clusters of pansies holding cheerful faces to the sun. Roses in August bloom.

By the south wing of the house the great cedar was still spreading its arms in benediction; beyond it the stream still tinkling amongst the elms, and overhead the cawing of the rooks...

The things that belonged to England's peace.

All this would still be going on when the carnage and massacre were ended.

When Michael —

He wondered.

Would Michael ever be back in his garden?

He studied the Rockery on his right, glowing with colour, every kind of low-growing bloom.

Williams must be working like a galley-slave with the two old men who were now helping him — "Keeping the garden up, or there'll be a murder when Mr. Michael returns." Williams had wanted to know all about Mr. Michael. He had told him what he could — the injury to his face and hands from saving a fellow airman, the transference from the R.A.F. to the N.F.S. He had said nothing of course about the rest. Williams had taken off his cap and scratched his head: "Well, sir, I never could see Mr. Michael doing that bombing. We got to win the war, but there's a lot of 'em saying it don't make bombing them cities right, any more'n Germans bombing London's

right." Thornton had changed the subject rather quickly. He could have told a man like Williams the whole truth.

He could have told Sir John and Lady St. Laurence the whole truth, but however he put it or explained it, they would conclude that Michael had left the Air Force, officially under disgrace. The Wing Commander had asked him to keep silent for the sake of everyone concerned.

Sir John had failed to understand, last night, why Michael had not come to Hollingham before going into the N.F.S. Thank God, Michael had not. Sir John would have started questioning, and he was not the kind of man to be put off. Lady St. Laurence had murmured, "Well, dear, perhaps he hadn't the time." Thornton had said quite truthfully that he had not, for he had passed straight from one Service into the other, and that in any case Michael would be shy about his face. Sir John had muttered, "Bad as that, eh?" He had kept their attention to it — Michael was badly disfigured, but later on . . . He had described the new process as he understood it. They had been as unhappy over the disfigurement as thrilled by the act that had caused it. "And never writing one word about it!" Lady St. Laurence had exclaimed. "Not done in the Services, my dear," from Sir John. The inevitable matter of Gabrielle had come up. Michael had informed her by letter that he was now in the N.F.S., and nothing more. They had heard from her a few days ago. Not a word about the tragedy of his disfigurement. Obviously, she knew nothing about it. Lady St. Laurence had remarked that Gabrielle would have to know some time. He had pointed out that, in the ordinary course of events, Gabrielle in the A.T.S. in the north and Michael in the N.F.S. in London were unlikely to meet at present; best leave things as they were? A lot of the disfigurement would be removed, after which it would be easier for them both. It had been decided to keep it from her for the present, as things were.

"Oh, this horrible war!" Lady St. Laurence had sighed. "Gabrielle and Michael would have been married by now."

They would have been, the monk reflected.

And, but for the war, Michael would not have been disfig-

ured, or dismissed from the Air Force, or now be endangering his life with the N.F.S. And Michael was only one of millions who would be disfigured, or massacred, or blasted into shapeless things of horror — sacrificed on the altar of Armageddon!

A ferocious Colonel, with whom he had argued, had banged out his conviction with his fist — the way to end war was to invent weapons that could wipe out nations, provided Great Britain got them first: "That'll put the fear of God into 'em!" No nation would dare to start a war. Thornton had disagreed — terrorism and fear would act as an incentive; another Big Power would go one better, and put the fear of God into Great Britain.

The fear of God?

Certainly. But to the Colonel the fear of God meant armaments. It was genuine fear of God that was needed to prevent this hideous deordination of His creation.

He had been watching a Demolition Squad at work on a mountain of debris that had been a house, digging for the living and the dead. He had whispered the general absolution for the dying beneath it. One of the Squad had noticed him and his collar. The man had sneered over his shoulder, "Why don't your God stop this bl—— massacre?" and then resumed his struggle with a baulk of timber which he was manifestly incapable of shifting. The monk had bent down, got his shoulder under and lifted it, and then answered the question with another, "Have you asked Him to?" The man, who had gaped at the unexpected exhibition of strength, looked uncomfortable, "Well, sir, I'm an agnostic like." The monk had suggested as politely as possible that agnosticism might be the answer to his question.

It was, fundamentally.

To ignore God was hardly to invite His help.

It was men like Michael, kneeling humbly before the Crucifix and Tabernacle, who were doing the work of saving the world; all those thousands of the Religious Orders, whom the world knew not, unwearily interceding; priests offering ceaselessly and pleading the Sacrifice of Calvary; the faithful of all nations

who served the Saviour of mankind without thought of reward in this life; the spiritual few to whom the many owed so much; who held the hand of God and kept heaven linked with earth and the agnostic world from perishing of its own insensate folly. . . . The few because of whom the Creator could not be driven from His world . . . .

His eye caught the Crucifix showing high up in a gable of the southern front, sculptured long ago in the stone and proclaiming Hollingham Catholic.

The symbol the world rejected.

The God-Man hanging there; until the end of time.

Crucified. Reigning. Conquering . . . .

The world had but to kneel there.

Lay there its miseries and madness; pride and power and hate.

It might be humiliating to kneel at the foot of the Cross.

But it was more humiliating to hang there . . . .

The sound of footsteps roused him.

His head turned. He shaded his eyes to the sun.

A girl in A.T.S. uniform was coming down the stone pathway to the Rockery.

He stared. It was a moment before he recognised her.

Gabrielle!

She came along smiling. Thornton rose to his feet. Gabrielle saluted, and then held out her hand. He took it.

"I'm sorry to give you such a shock, Padre. Mother nearly fainted just now."

"I won't faint," he replied. "But where on earth have you sprung from?"

"I've not exactly sprung. I've jumped three very obliging lorries from Bradford to London."

"I can believe it."

"Believe it?"

"That they were very obliging. You're looking more beautiful than ever. Why didn't you send a telegram?"

"I did. It will probably arrive to-morrow."

"Does the Army always stand to attention?"

She sat down in the deck-chair. He went and fetched another for himself from the summer-house nearby, trying to collect his thoughts. He hadn't foreseen her arrival like this. Michael?

"This is very nice. How long have you got?"

"Three days. It's topping to find you here, Padre."

She asked him:

"How's London?"

He concentrated his attention and did his best to describe things, the city area destroyed by incendiaries in the spring, the desolation of the East-end, whole streets gone; the West-end with its gaping ruins. She listened, frowning sadly.

"Tell me about the hospital."

He gave her an account of what would be of interest to her, his experiences during the Battle of London, the work of the staff, the tragic nights with the casualties pouring in. She listened, looking away over the garden, the pain of it all reflected in her eyes.

"That's an officer's uniform, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"Congratulations."

He asked her about the A.T.S. life. She liked it on the whole, she told him; the loss of freedom had been rather trying at first, but one got used to it. There was a splendid spirit in the A.T.S. which she found inspiring. The bombing of Sheffield had been horrible; she had been billeted there at the time. Two ghastly nights of slaughter and destruction.

"Padre, how's it all going to end?"

He shrugged.

"Will America come in, do you think?"

Thornton pursed his lips.

"She will, if Japan attacks her."

"Japan? Why, is that likely?"

"It's beginning to look likely. I believe the best big noises think so — Japan waiting her chance . . . Diplomatic pressure from Germany . . .

He tailed off. Gabrielle was playing for time. She was watching him uncertainly. He could sense her bracing herself. "I want to know about Michael, Padre."

It came firmly.

"You saw him about a month ago, didn't you?"

"I saw him at his R.A.F. Station in July," he replied.

"I don't know what's really happened? He won't tell me anything, except that he's with the N.F.S. He told me nothing when he was in the Air Force. I've never even known why he went into it. Did he get a commission or what?"

It came pouring out quickly, in a determined way. She intended to get the truth from him.

"He's hiding something from me, isn't he?"

"Nothing that he's ashamed of. You know that, without my telling you."

"Of course I do. Because I know Michael. But he's keeping something back."

Thornton handed her his cigarettes. She took one. He lit it for her, and then began filling his pipe slowly, trying to decide what to say. He wished he had been prepared for this.

"Listen, Gabrielle. I'm not at liberty to tell you everything, and you'll have to believe me when I say that."

She broke out:

"Why shouldn't I be told everything! I'm engaged to Michael."

He hesitated for a moment. Michael had never actually asked him to keep it from her. The other thing—no; he had given his word to the Wing Commander on that.

"Gabrielle, I persuaded your father and mother last night to keep something from you for the present. However, you're here now."

She regarded him with sudden anxiety in her eyes.

"About Michael?"

"Yes. You've said nothing about it in your letters to them, so I'm assuming Michael's not told you?"

"He's told me nothing of any importance."

Thornton studied the unlit pipe in his hand.

"I can tell you about this if you wish it."

"Michael won't mind?"

"I don't think so. He feels he can't do it himself, I should imagine."

Thornton thought for a moment.

"This is going to hurt, Gabrielle; but you'd have had to know some time."

He told her that Michael had been injured about the face and hands. Rather badly.

"Injured?"

There was a pause.

"An accident?"

"No," Thornton said. He told her in a few words what had happened. An airman had crashed and the plane been in flames immediately. Michael had chanced his own life, gone into the furnace, and by a miracle got him out.

She sat quite still, her eyes shining.

"But, how glorious!"

"It *was* glorious," he affirmed.

The anxiety returned.

"He was injured? You mean — burns?"

"Not quite ordinary burns, I'm afraid."

She was trying to read his eyes.

"He's — well, all right again, I suppose?"

It was terribly difficult, this. Thornton saw again that almost unrecognisable face that had turned to him when he entered the guard-room.

"His eyes are all right."

Her face paled as the significance of the words dawned upon her. He said quickly:

"A good deal of it will be put right, later on. I'm getting him into the hands of a specialist."

She sat there, still and white, visualising. Realisation had come. . . After a while she fumbled in the pocket of her tunic and found a letter. She appeared to be examining the address at the head, and considering.

"He's at the Knightsbridge N.F.S. Station."

She put back the letter in her pocket and said determinedly: "I'm going up to see him to-morrow."

Thornton leaned forward:

"I wouldn't, my dear."

"I must. I can't let him —— It's too cruel to do nothing."

"Gabrielle, wait until things have improved. It would only be painful for both of you." She mustn't see him as he was at present — those ghastly knots and twists.

"Write to him this evening."

She was crying.

"Gabrielle, I'm so sorry."

Oh, this hellish war!

He waited whilst she found her handkerchief, wondering whether she would want to know more, and what he could say if she did. . . After a minute she asked tremulously whether Michael himself would sooner she didn't see him at present.

"He's human feelings, my dear, and he loves you."

"He wouldn't like —— I see what you mean. . . I think I'll write to him, then."

She remained pensive, with her eyes on the Rockery, taking it in pathetically. He could almost read her thoughts.

"That's Michael's robin."

He looked. The robin was perched on a Rockery stone, its head on one side, questioningly. Thornton held out his hand. The robin hopped closer, but decided there was something unfamiliar.

"He knows you're not Michael."

The robin discovered a worm, got to work, and flew off with it.

"I suppose I ought to see it as they do in the A.T.S., when they've brothers who've been smashed up. Their 'finest hour' and all that."

She remained pensive again.

"Padre, why did he ever join the R.A.F.? Or is that something you're not free to tell me?"

He tried desperately to decide whether he could.

"Michael could never have done the bombing," she affirmed.  
"Nothing would ever make him do that. I know it."

Thornton made a fatal slip without perceiving it:  
"Of course not."

"Why did he suddenly leave? Men don't leave the Air Force like that. Unless ——"

"Gabrielle, he was acting on a principle of his own, and I can't say more."

She sat back.

"You needn't. I know now."

Know?

"I'm not a fool, Padre. It was the way you said, 'of course not.'"

Thornton looked at the pipe in his hand. He took out a match-box, selected a match slowly and lit up.

"Gabrielle, I had rather a difficult time at the Station. I'd been sent for by the Wing Commander as Michael's best friend. I can't let that Wing Commander down."

"I'm not asking you to. But you can't stop me using a little common sense. I don't know why, but Michael got his commission of course—but he was not going to do the bombing."

Thornton inhaled and watched a cloud of smoke drifting.

"You can hardly want me to assume that he left the Air Force disgraced?" she asked.

Thornton moved and faced her.

"You seem to have guessed a good deal, so I'll tell you this much. Michael was not dismissed or disgraced in the technical sense. He was transferred to the N.F.S."

"For refusing to obey orders, of course."

He wished she wouldn't nail him down.

"Gabrielle, shall we put it like this? I don't know what would have happened if he'd not saved that pilot's life and got those injuries. As it was, he had the respect of the whole Station, for doing it. In common decency they couldn't disgrace him, although officially it's an appalling thing to disobey orders."

It was worked so that Michael should merely be off the strength. That's the official phrase. Shall we leave it at that?"

She smiled gratefully.

"That's all I wanted to know."

It had relieved her mind immensely, on one point at any rate.

"Thank you, Padre."

He said whimsically:

"I only hope I've not let down the Wing Commander. Anyhow, keep it to yourself."

She was studying him:

"You didn't tell Michael it was an appalling thing?"

"I told him it was a magnificent thing."

She held out her hand.

"God bless you, Padre."

She said meditatively:

"I don't care what he does, if he believes it's right. . . He's got to do these things. He's like that. . . He had to do it at Dunkirk. . . He had to save that airman. . . He's not going to kill. . . And I love him for it, all the more. . . Only, it's difficult to believe."

"To believe?"

"Well, that it *is* Michael."

He saw what she meant:

"The 'horrors'? How he does it at all?"

"Yes, considering what happened on the boat."

Thornton thumbed down the ash in his pipe:

"I know. He doesn't panic now, apparently. It's probably a heavy strain on his nerves, all the same. But he makes himself do it. . . There was a nasty moment at Dunkirk — he probably told you — but he just drove ahead with his cargo of men. A psychologist would say, sublimation. Partly, but — Did you ever notice Michael in the chapel here?"

The seeming irrelevance puzzled her.

"In the evening? He always kept an hour there."

"Nothing struck you particularly?"

"Well, I didn't often go in at that time. I had a feeling he wanted to be alone."

Thornton asked:

"When a young man of Michael's age remains still for an hour every night before the Blessed Sacrament, you'd consider it out of the ordinary?"

"Of course. But he is out of the ordinary, spiritually."

Thornton considered for a moment.

"Gabrielle, how much do you know about Michael spiritually? It sounds impertinent, but you said it was difficult to believe that it *was* Michael, doing these things."

"I don't mind in the least. I know very little about him spiritually, except what I've noticed. Michael can't talk about himself, even to me — not on those things. He never could."

"Except what you've noticed?"

"One can't help noticing something. He's become — spiritualised, if that's the word. It's in his face."

She remembered suddenly, and looked away.

Thornton said quickly:

"Michael's travelled a long way since those days on board. You've guessed that?"

"I know he has." She smiled. "I used to 'mother' him; I can't imagine 'mothering' him now."

He asked:

"Shall I tell you something? I rather think it's why 'he's doing all this."

"He wouldn't mind?"

"He wouldn't mind now," Thornton replied.

He told her the main facts — Michael's experience as a boy in the woods on that April day long ago, the Presence of Eternal Beauty he had perceived so vividly, of a Being Whom he knew intuitively for the Creator of the world of nature that he loved, and then his recognition of that Being as Personal, the God to Whom he owed the homage of his own being. Religion had meant nothing to him until then; Chesters had been responsible for that.

"It really happened? A kind of vision?"

"I'd call it more a revelation. Yes, it was the way he told it convinced me."

"He couldn't have imagined it?"

"No. There were no grounds for imagining it; he had never even related nature to a Creator in his own mind."

The imaginative part had come later, he told her. Michael had been driven into himself by that life at Chesters and built up a whole structure of morbid notions of his own. Ugliness, hideousness, everything that spoilt creation were irreconcilable with Eternal Beauty; evil in themselves, antagonistic, to be avoided like sin.

"Do you see it? Subjectivism run riot?"

"Yes, I think I do. Is that —— The 'horrors' came from that, I suppose?"

"Unquestionably."

He had seen it directly Michael opened out to him, he told her; and why that pathetic business had happened on deck. He had done his best to make him realise that it was his own wild notions preying on his mind that made him panic. It was more or less a matter of rationalising things. Michael, when he had him listening quietly, had seen it himself. He had told him to get down to the facts of religion and lent him a book on the Faith.

"But it happened again in New Zealand," she reminded him.

"At the Pageant? I imagine Michael was his normal composed self sitting there with you, until those crucifixions were suddenly banged on him. There was no hysteria though. He couldn't face them, that was all. I'm glad it *did* happen there."

"Glad?"

Because it had brought things to a head, he told her. He had had it out with Michael next morning. Those crucifixions had confronted him violently with the thing he found revolting in Christianity — Calvary. He refused to associate God with the Cross, at the mercy of everything loathsome and hideous. He had told Michael in so many words that to pit his own repugnances against the ways of Almighty God was sheer spiritual egocentrism. It had been a matter of literally beating Michael to his knees and compelling him to face the Creator Himself with his objections.

Gabrielle remarked:

"I remember now. It was at Bishop's House that evening; I was worried about him after that Stadium business, only you were confident it was going to be all right."

Thornton smiled reminiscingly.

"I think he saw that it was himself really all along, and that if God could go through those 'horrors,' He'd see to it that he went through with his own."

He thought for a moment.

"I'm not sure when I first noticed it, but something changed in Michael. Perhaps it was remarks he made when we were going about New Zealand; you could see him adjusting himself to the Crucifixion. He made himself kneel before the Calvary in churches. I asked him in Auckland before I received him into the Church whether he accepted the Crucifixion without any reservations, and he said he accepted it fully with all its implications."

"Implications?"

"He put it like that."

"What did he mean?"

"I didn't quite know at the time."

He waited and then said:

"I knew when I saw him last month at the Air Station. That expression of his came back to me when — Shall I go on?"

"Yes, Padre. Go on."

"You said he had become — spiritualised. It was more than that. Something the disfigurement couldn't hide. It was in his eyes; the way he stood there. He was almost indifferent to what had happened to him. He said nothing; it was more what he didn't say."

She remained intent, listening.

"It came to me afterwards when I was back in London, what he had meant — the implications of the Crucifixion for himself. He had been doing it all deliberately — Dunkirk, going into that furnace, refusing to kill. Can you see him making himself go through with it, hating it with his sensitiveness — cruci-

fying himself? If God's way was the Cross, it was going to be his way too?"

"Yes. . . I think I do now. . . Michael would be like that. God would see to it that he didn't panic?"

Thornton said:

"There was a car accident here, he told me; he helped get the man up to the hospital, and for the first time there was no sense of panic."

She remembered it. Michael had been almost like a boy that evening, excited because he hadn't panicked. Thornton smiled.

"He couldn't do these things of course if he panicked. I think it *is* that, the Almighty seeing to it somehow that he doesn't."

She asked after a while:

"He looked different when you saw him? I don't mean the injuries."

It was difficult to put it into words, Thornton answered. Something in his whole bearing.

"Would you know what I meant if I said — transfigured?"

She repeated it to herself:

"Transfigured?"

## CHAPTER XXV

**H**E WATCHED the figure in the N.F.S. uniform disappear round the corner of the monastery, and then went in again and up to his room.

He glanced at the slip of note-paper on which Michael had scribbled the address of the Fire Station. Thornton knew the street. It was a short distance away from the hospital, and half a mile or so from the monastery.

Great!

Michael had said little as usual, but he must have done well up at Knightsbridge to be re-attached to a City Fire Station. The monk had been up at times since last summer to see him at Knightsbridge. Michael had shown him over the engines, the sleeping and feeding quarters, and appeared keen on his new job. It meant everything to him that he was saving life now; he had put his back into his training course to become competent. On the N.F.S. strength he had settled down to it grimly — the routine, fire-fighting nights and the risks; falling masonry seemed to be the fireman's dread.

"Map of London"?

They had called him that at the Knightsbridge Station in reference to his face, and he hadn't minded; every fireman had his name. The only thing Michael had minded was lest they should hear of how he got the injuries. He had asked Thornton on his first visit to say nothing.

That was Michael.

The strained look in his eyes, so noticeable at the R.A.F. Station, was no longer markedly there. He had gone through with it, carried out his intention, and left the Air Force. That episode in his life was finished. He barely mentioned the Air Force now. Thornton had asked him whether his act had had any effect; he had said that a pilot-officer had asked for his release on the day he left the Station. What had happened he

didn't know. He believed that as far as possible silence had been maintained on the matter. The Wing Commander had made things as easy for him as he could.

There was still that something in his bearing the monk had called "transfigured." It was indefinite, but it expressed it sufficiently. "Purposefulness" had occurred to him too. Michael was acting deliberately, carrying out what he had set himself to do, even now in the N.F.S. He had virtually said so on one occasion; they had been looking at the ruins of a block of flats opposite the Knightsbridge Station, with the Demolition Squad still searching for bodies after three days of it: "It's hellish, and I'd get away from it all if I could; but one can't while everyone's getting it, even if it means being killed. It would be like turning one's back on the Crucifixion."

Michael was going through with it whatever happened and however he hated what it involved. It had to be that way.

And for himself it was the way of the Cross.

Raids had become sporadic once the Battle of London was over. The Luftwaffe was aiming now to cripple war industries rather than merely smash cities.

From out of the skies on December 7th, 1941, Japan had suddenly hurled death and destruction on Pearl Harbour, and America was in the war.

On that date Michael, released from his duties temporarily and by arrangement with the plastic surgeon, had gone into Thornton's hospital for the surgical work on his face and hands. The process had consisted mainly in softening up tissues, incessant saline bathing, removing knots and grafting skin under an anaesthetic. Thornton had gone in to see him frequently — Michael lying there in the ward with his eyes and nostrils alone visible for the bandages, unable to talk except with difficulty through a slit over his mouth. There had been none of the septicaemia liable to accompany plastic surgery; Michael according to the surgeon was the kind of healthy "specimen" he liked working on.

The day had come for the stitches to be removed. Then there had been a treatment of the skin with some special prepa-

ration. Later on an electrical process would remove to an extent the markings of the stitches and graftings.

Michael had emerged from the hospital this morning in early March with his new face, and presented himself at the monastery. He had found the monk working in his room. Thornton had sat him down facing the light, and studied him from various angles, Michael grinning in an amused shy way. It was a curious experience, the monk found, looking at a face you had known familiarly, that had vanished for a time, and then, more or less, returned. The old contours were there again. It was Michael's grin. The drooped cheek had gone, but there was a slight pucker at the corner of his mouth. The markings of the stitches were still there, and the grafted skin still showed pale in places. "Dunkirk" was noticeable.

Still, it was Michael's face.

The surgeon had made an amazing job of it. Thornton examined the hands. They were scarred, but no more.

"Nice to see your face again, Michael."

Michael had laughed, and there were none of those painful angular ridges.

"Will Gabrielle know me?"

Gabrielle would want to know where the face was that had kept her from seeing him, Thornton had assured him.

They had talked for a while, then:

"By the way, Padre, there's something . . ."

Michael had asked him what he thought he ought to do. Gabrielle, as far as he could see, would be billeted up North for the duration, whilst the N.F.S. pinned him to London. There would be a week or so off once or twice a year for both of them, but otherwise there'd be little chance of them meeting. To be married and virtually separated wouldn't be like marriage at all. In her last letter ("she's bucked about the old face being ironed out") she had asked him herself what they should do. They both wanted to get married now, but . . .

"Damn it all, Padre, what's one to do?"

Thornton had rubbed his chin, wondering what to say. It was the problem of thousands of young people in this war.

Marrying, promptly separated, and heaven knew when they'd see each other again. Married and no married life . . .

"What would you prefer yourself, Michael? Marry now or wait?"

"On the whole I'd sooner wait. We're both young."

"What do you suppose Gabrielle would prefer?"

"She'll agree to wait, if I think it's better."

Thornton had said:

"Well, that seems to decide it."

He had asked:

"When do you go back to Knightsbridge?"

"I don't," Michael had replied. He had taken an official-looking letter from his pocket. "Read that."

Thornton had done so. It contained an order to report himself to the N.F.S. City Station near the hospital for re-attachment there when passed fit for service.

"This is great! I'll be able to keep my eye on you."

"I'll be able to get my hose on you if you get an incendiary in the pants," Michael had returned.

He had been this morning more like himself before the war. Boyish again . . .

Thornton stood for a while before the window.

Thank heaven for that plastic surgeon!

Gabrielle would have to know everything. Another letter to write. Michael would probably say, "Face finished," and nothing more. He glanced at the letters on the table awaiting answers.

Life was becoming more normal again. Occasional bombs, but no longer that nerve-racking blitz from sunset to dawn when any sort of consecutive work had been impossible. He was lecturing again now and preaching in London churches.

He looked at the dome of St. Paul's brooding there over the desolation all round. Symbol of British patience and endurance. There were clouds overhead scurrying along in the March wind, patches of blue in between—the dome now in light, now in shadow.

Light and shadow. Hope and dread. Triumph and disaster, in never-ending sequence. Russia, Japan, America. The world was now in it to the death.

Across the road children were grubbing about in the debris of what had been a house, a boy brandishing a boot he had found, another disputing its possession. There was a bath sticking out of the rubble, and a man's coat hanging high up on an exposed wall, a mattress dangling from a floor-joist. He had seen a piece of cake lying on the pavement the morning after the hit, out of which a single bite had been taken, bearing its mute witness.

That debris represented one of a million similar slaughters of the innocent!

Total war. Everybody in it. Many no longer in it . . . Michael getting down to it again. Doing it because he had to. Gabrielle doing her bit up North.

Thousands like them.

Waiting.

Hoping . . .

He glanced upwards.

The dome was in shadow. . .

Now it was in the light. . .

## CHAPTER XXVI

ON A DAY in the middle of May the monk was called from his breakfast in the refectory to the telephone. It was Michael with excitement in his voice:

"Gabrielle's coming up for a week, Padre. . . Yoicks!"

"Do the best firemen say 'Yoicks'? . . . This is splendid! When?"

Thornton listened. Gabrielle would be in London this evening. Week's leave. She had a room at the Cumberland, Marble Arch. "The Chief" was releasing him from his duties to-morrow, and when possible during the next few days. Thornton gave his opinion that the war should be called off for the next few days.

"Does the N.F.S. salute the A.T.S. or the other way round?" Michael asked. "Ring up Whitehall," Thornton told him. He listened again. . .

Yes, he would have lunch with them at the Cumberland. . .

No, not to-morrow; he wouldn't get a look-in. . .

Yes, he'd fix it. . .

Yes. . .

Yes. . .

"Yoicks!"

Shortly before nine that evening Thornton went along to the hospital in answer to a sick-call from one of the wards.

The city streets were more or less deserted as usual. It was warm, with heavy clouds overhead that promised rain. The cavernous boom of Big Ben came for the nine o'clock news as he passed a building that so far had escaped. He was nearing the main entrance to the hospital when his ear caught the wail of the sirens in the distance. Next moment it was coming from all round.

Before black-out? It was the clouds of course. They had been free of it lately. . . The Germans had an uncanny way of knowing when there were clouds over London.

He went up the steps and inside. In the entrance-hall he found one of the doctors putting on his tin-hat according to regulations.

"Evening, Padre. Don't see yours?"

Thornton thought he must have dropped it on the way, and went on upstairs. Along the corridor that led to C Ward he ran into the matron. They greeted one another cheerfully.

Inside C Ward he found screens round the bed to which he had been summoned. The head-surgeon and a nurse were coming out.

"Hullo, Doc."

"Evening, Padre. Your turn" . . .

It took him fifteen minutes administering the Sacraments to the sick man. He came from behind the screens aware of a quietness in the ward, and remembered there was an Alert on. The head-surgeon was still there, talking with the matron who had come in. He nodded to a patient he knew and at the same moment heard anti-aircraft letting loose. He was about to ——

The whine of the bomb came with an unpleasant crescendo, and then the cr-rump of the explosion.

A second followed in quick succession, nearby, shaking the hospital to its foundations. . .

Thornton saw the surgeon and the matron crouching and heads disappearing under blankets. He crouched instinctively himself. . .

There was no whine this time, but an ugly menacing rustle. . .

The floor of the ward seemed to rise as the vast roar of it shattered his hearing and something struck violently against his head. He was vaguely aware of slipping and falling, and lying there unable to rise . . . of pin-points of light flashing and shapes dancing. . . There was a focus of consciousness on

which he was trying to fasten. . . He had to hold on to that focus. . .

The shapes came slowly to a standstill.

The paralysing inertia was gradually lifting. He tried to make out things . . . there was smoke everywhere, billowing and glowing luridly. He managed to raise himself on to his elbow. The effort of it brought his head throbbing painfully. He waited a moment, and then succeeded in getting to his feet. He stood there swaying, holding on to the end of a bed, waiting for the dizziness to pass. . .

His vision was clearing. He began taking things in. That chair lying on the floor was what had stunned him. . . There was no wall at the end of the ward. He could see through into the next ward, figures moving dimly and frantically. There was a dark abyss between the two wards from which screams seemed to be coming, and flames licking up over broken floor-joists. The sight aroused him to action. He knew now what had happened — a direct hit on the wards.

There was a bed with a man in it lying there whimpering perilously close to the flames. He made for it and dragged it away, and then the one opposite likewise. The other beds were not yet in danger. Some were jammed up together. The occupants were staring dazedly about them. There were no windows, glass everywhere, a gaping hole in the ceiling. The doors at the further end were hanging twistedly. He shouted at a man struggling to get out of bed to stay there, and then made his way along unsteadily. A nurse was getting to her feet with difficulty. Near the doors two human forms were lying, thrust up against the wall. He went and bent over. The blast had flung them there — the surgeon and the matron who had been standing talking. "Keep in your beds, will you! We'll be getting you out of here in a minute." He made a quick examination. They were both of them unconscious, but alive. Where on earth —

He went out down the corridor, to the head of the stairs, and saw the scene of wild confusion in the entrance-hall. The outer doors in flames, the A.R.P. smashing their way into A

Ward with axes, which must have had it far worse than C above. Two of them saw him and ran up. He took them with him back to C.

The next five minutes were spent in getting the beds well away from the flames which were climbing rapidly to the floor above. Thornton went quickly along the corridor to the ward on the other side of the stairs. Inside he found some nurses waiting anxiously for orders. He told them it was an emergency, and would they clear C Ward of all patients immediately, find one of the doctors, and not move the matron until he had seen her — say he had told them.

He went down into the entrance-hall, with the roar of fire-engines and the clanging of their bells dinging into his ears from the street. Firemen were already at work, efficient and imperturbable as usual, laying hoses into A Ward whose doors had now been hacked away. He could see the far end, a wall of flame. Stretcher-bearers, under the direction of a ward Sister, were carrying out patients white-faced and scared across the hall and away into safety. There were casualties amongst them, he noticed. He asked the ward Sister to let him know directly he was wanted; they would find him outside or here in the hall.

He made his way through the debris of the entrance and remains of incendiaries steaming in puddles of water.

The street outside was a strangely impressive sight, lined with gleaming engines, great fire-ladders climbing into the sky, fire-fighting equipment, firemen getting into action, moving quietly and unhurriedly, each of them knowing his job. He suddenly realised — Michael would be here somewhere amongst them! The hospital came under his Section.

He went down the steps and dodged his way through to the opposite side. "You can't do that, sir," came sharply. It was a fireman unloading asbestos suits in readiness. Thornton told him he was the Catholic chaplain to the hospital. "That's all right, sir, as long as we know." Thornton looked up shading his eyes from the glare. It was very much worse than he realised. The whole roof from one end of the immense north wing to the other was in flames. "Incendiaries. Cartloads,"

the fireman remarked drily. He laid out an asbestos suit on a heap. "We ain't supposed to talk on duty, but your 'ead's bleedin', sir." Thornton thanked him—it was only scalp. "You ain't got your bearin's yet?" Thornton said he was trying to, he'd only just come out. The glare was blinding him. "Down the road—what you're lookin' for. 'Ell of a mess." Thornton made it out to the right, a vast black cavern from which smoke was billowing in thick clouds. He went along the pavement in the direction.

He could see now. The north wing of the hospital was practically cut in two. The cavernous opening ran from the top and widened out down to the ground floor. He estimated there would be at least half a dozen wards affected. He crossed over beneath a fire-ladder. The Demolition Squad were at work, smashing down railings, heaving away timbers and masonry, choking with the acrid fumes. Above them powerful streams were playing on to what must be a veritable inferno behind the impenetrable volumes of smoke. By the flames overhead climbing ruthlessly the entire centre of the north wing was ablaze.

"Bad show, Padre?"

He turned to find one of the doctors beside him, a Catholic named Treves. He agreed it was a mighty bad show. Treves informed him they'd got his message and one of them was attending to the two now—the matron was in a pretty bad way. He noticed Thornton's head. He had stopped a chair, Thornton told him, but it was only scalp.

He learned that all the wards affected had been cleared and casualties were being attended to. Treves was standing by for whatever had to be done here; not a living being could get near that furnace for the present.

A ward Sister was coming along the pavement. Treves went to meet her. They spoke for a minute together. Treves came back:

There were over thirty beds missing from six wards, he had learned—in each case those that had been nearest to the hit. The firemen up in D could see some of the frameworks down below, but nothing more.

Their eyes met. Treves muttered, "God help 'em!" and then went up to a fireman further along who was issuing orders at intervals. Thornton whispered the absolution; some of them by a miracle might be still alive. It was hideous to think of what lay behind that curtain of smoke.

Treves returned. According to the fireman they would be getting them out on this side, as soon as the asbestos men could break through. Within the hour probably —

"You're wanted, Father Thornton. Ward H." It was one of the hospital orderlies. Treves told him to take Father Thornton to the ward and then ask the stretcher-bearers to come along as soon as they were free. Thornton remembered that Treves was the second on the staff and would therefore be in charge now. He was to be thankful for it later on.

He went with the orderly to the main entrance. Perched high above them on their fire-ladders firemen were playing their hoses on the roof. At the end of the street behind barriers a crowd was watching in silence. The tense quietness of it all struck him. He remembered again — Michael was here somewhere fighting in this grim battle with the flames. . . Gabrielle? Up at the Cumberland, in ignorance of what was happening down here.

The All Clear sounded as they reached the steps. One mercy!

In Ward H, away from danger in the south wing, he found things fairly orderly. The ward Sister came up to him. There were some fifty casualties from the six wards, mostly operation cases. She gave him the bed numbers of those in danger of death. A Catholic nurse would be in waiting, if he needed her help. Thornton asked would someone phone the monastery for a second priest to come along, and bring everything with him; he scribbled it down on paper. She handed it to a nurse with directions, and then led him to the private wards beyond.

His work for the night had begun. . .

It was past half past ten and getting dark when he came out into Ward H again, leaving the other priest to attend to the re-

maining cases. He wanted to see what was happening outside, and whether there was more work for him —

Things were suddenly spinning. His hand caught at the end of a bed. . . There was a sense of nausea. . .

The ward Sister came up anxiously. He waited for the dizziness to pass; he had forgotten about his head. He told her he'd had a bit of a crack upstairs. She insisted on seeing to it at once.

Five minutes later, with strapping on his head and a borrowed tin-hat to protect it, he was outside viewing the roof. Things were better. They had the flames under control, except for isolated places still flaring; some of the firemen had come down from their ladders. He went along to the gaping opening in the centre, to be met by a gruesome sight. They were lying side by side in the roadway, what once had been human forms and were now no more than black cindered shapes. . . He sent a prayer to heaven for the souls that were no longer there, and then went close and studied them for a moment.

There was a hot sour mixture of smoke and steam floating about. He could see into the cavernous interior now; there were no longer flames, but piles of black debris glowing in places; weird ghostly figures in white asbestos moving amidst vapour, treading cautiously, lifting more of those ghastly dark shapes, carrying them out. . . The interiors of the wards showed dimly like so many tunnels. There was an uncanny hollow sound of ceaseless dripping. That same silence; the hushed voices of the firemen standing-by. Treves saw him and came up, his face drawn and wretched.

"My God, it's cruel!"

The human being in him was uppermost. Thornton could only sympathise with his whole heart. It was the torture of it, Treves muttered — trapped like that! Thornton told him, for his consolation, that he doubted whether there had been torture for most of them: "Come here." He led him to that pathetic row lying there and pointed it out — many of them virtually decapitated or with ribs driven in flat, killed instantly by the explosion or crushed. Treves saw what he meant, and thanked

God for it. He regarded Thornton for a moment:

"I'd forgotten you were a surgeon, Padre."

Treves asked him about the casualties inside. Thornton told him they were almost all of them operation cases and were already being taken to the theatres — there were some forty in all, he believed. Treves decided to go and get on with it himself, there was no point now in remaining here. Forty? It looked like being up most of the night. He went off.

Thornton caught from somewhere behind him, "Okay, hold on." He turned to find he was close to the wheels of a fire-ladder. A fireman came past and went across to speak to someone, presumably the "Chief" of his Section. Thornton's eye travelled up the hand-rail of the ladder to the figure at the top still playing a steady stream on the roof. The fireman returned. He watched him pull a cord and signal to the figure up there who answered with a wave of the hand. The fireman called, "Coming down now," to a mate in the background. The stream curved down and stopped. The figure descended rung by rung.

It was not until he was within a few feet of the ground that something familiar about him struck Thornton. Next moment he knew who it was. Michael was on the ground shaking himself and adjusting his steel-helmet. He smiled at his mate and then saw Thornton.

"Hullo, Padre. I guessed you'd be about."

"Hullo, Michael."

His face was black smudges of sweat. He asked him what it was like up there. They'd got the fire under, Michael told him, but most of the roof had fallen in. He asked what was happening inside. Thornton told him in a few words.

Michael was looking about him. His eyes were suddenly transfixed. He had seen those gruesome things lying there. Thornton saw him go white under the black streaks. "My God! . . ." He set his teeth hard and looked away, fighting the horror of it down, and then said in an unsteady voice: "I'll have to report, Padre." He saluted and went across to the pavement.

Something was happening over there. . .

Thornton went to the place quickly. The asbestos figures in the interior were clustered together near the break in the wall to the right. An unconsumed tangle of floor-joists from above leaned roofwise as they had fallen against the interior wall of the ward. They were struggling to shift the masonry that blocked their passage to whatever might be beyond, and enclosed there.

Some firemen came up bearing a ladder, debated hurriedly, and then made for a window further along. They lifted the ladder over the railings and propped it against the wall. One of them was heaved over after it. He went up with an axe and began smashing the twisted frame-work away. A minute later he was crawling through and letting himself down inside. Thornton saw Michael come up and stand by.

It happened with incredible swiftness.

Whether it was the shifting of the masonry, or more probably the wall itself already cracked by the blast, a split was suddenly appearing running up jaggedly over the lintel of the window. The firemen saw it and shouted the warning to their mates by the railing. They looked up and backed quickly away.

Michael however did not move.

He was peering at something inside.

Thornton saw him rush forward as a figure scrambled through the window with a small child, got a leg on the ladder outside, and leaned down. Michael grabbed and had it in his arms. He glanced at the wall and next instant had flung himself down, thrusting under a stack of timbers, clutching his burden beneath him, his free hand reaching for a hold. . .

The wall came down with a roar, an avalanche of stone and mortar. . .

White dust rose slowly in a cloud.

Thornton drove down a wild impulse to shout at those men to get on with it. It was torment to stand there with nothing to do but wait. Sane reason told him they knew their job; there

was no other way of doing it. A false move and that timber might shift.

It was the one chance, they had told him, that the timbers had held and kept the weight of masonry off. They could see the timbers already with their torches, through the hole they had picked in the debris. They were widening it cautiously, two of them lying flat, dripping with perspiration in the warm summer night, handing up loose stuff in pails, others moving away stones, all in the same careful way. There was no sound except for the low voices of firemen waiting as Thornton was waiting, and of water still playing here and there.

The Demolition men worked on in silence.

A few yards away, by where the window had been, they had recovered the body of the fireman who had brought out that tiny mite. He was crushed beyond recognition, and must have been instantly killed. The stretcher-bearers had come up and performed their pitiful task.

A fireman appeared accompanied by the ward Sister of B looking harassed and strained. She assured them that the ward had been cleared of every bed that it was possible to get at. The little girl had been near this end, brought in three days ago. The floor from above had come down and they could do nothing; they had been told to leave it to the firemen. She was peering anxiously into the now exposed interior of the ward. There was a tumbled up heap of blankets and a mattress under which probably the fireman had found the child. The woman in the next bed had been found alive, the rest nearer the explosion were dead.

There was a sudden stir.

They were shining their torches on to something below. There came unmistakably — the whimpering cry of a child. . .

It was some fifteen minutes later.

There had been little difficulty in moving and handing up the child. Michael's back had been hunched over her. She was untouched except for scratches, a little dark-eyed thing looking about her in a surprised way. There was no doctor

available; Thornton had examined her quickly and then handed her over to the ward Sister to take in, the firemen looking on with a kind of reverence.

It had not been so easy with Michael. The timbers had not shifted and had saved him, but his left arm which was projecting had been crushed to a pulp by masonry. They had succeeded in getting it free, moving him by degrees, and finally lifting him through the hole.

He lay now on the pavement, with a coat beneath him, Thornton examining the unconscious form. There were splinters of wood driven into the shoulder, and one he didn't like above the lung. . . There was nothing elsewhere as far as he could judge.

Michael would live, but it meant operating without delay.

He nodded to the stretcher-bearers, showed them how to place the arm, and stood up.

He found himself swaying. A fireman caught hold of him. . . This wouldn't do! He made a fierce effort and the dizziness passed.

"Ought to be in bed, with that 'ead, sir."

He said he was all right.

They had Michael on the stretcher. He was coming to in the open air. Thornton saw his eyelids flickering and then open. He looked about weakly. Recollection seemed to be slowly returning. Thornton spoke to him quietly and then told the stretcher-bearers to take him to one of the private wards beyond H. He wanted the ward Sister of H. . .

She said in answer to his question:

"There's not a surgeon available, Father." They were every one of them operating at the moment, more cases waiting, ready, and there were hours of it ahead.

Thornton went back into the private ward where Michael lay upon a bed, his face drawn, but singularly calm. There was a nurse in attendance.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Michael."

The nurse looked puzzled. He explained to her that he had

been a surgeon, and asked her to help him strip the clothes off. . .

He examined carefully for the second time.

When he had finished he turned to find a figure in white standing beside him — Dr. Treves. The doctor sent the nurse to see to his next case being in readiness. He drew Thornton away:

"This is highly irregular, Padre."

Thornton admitted it, but it was a highly irregular night. Treves told him that the casualties were all being examined and operated upon in turn, and received the answer that this particular casualty couldn't wait his turn. Thornton led him to the bed and showed him. Treves examined and saw what he meant.

"There's no surgeon free."

Thornton said there was. He himself was free.

"You're putting me in a very difficult situation, Padre."

"You mean it's against every regulation?"

Treves did. Thornton asked him if regulations came first before human life; this was an emergency. Treves regarded him with a sudden angry impatience. And then his face softened. He looked towards the bed. . .

"Very well, Padre. But the entire responsibility is on you."

Thornton said he would accept entire responsibility.

"You're confident you can do it?"

"If I wasn't, I shouldn't attempt it."

Treves walked to the door, and then turned:

"The head-surgeon's free for the present. I'll see the ward Sister now. Go ahead and good luck!"

The anaesthetist watched. Michael's eyes closed. They waited, those four figures in white, Thornton with his eyes on the instruments with which once he had been so familiar.

He had been through them already carefully, making sure. He felt cool now. He had calculated everything that had to be done — that piece above the lung, the other splinters, then the arm. The ward Sister and the nurse waiting on either side

of the operating-table were both competent. He had spoken to them first, in case the strangeness of the situation should shake their confidence. . .

He signed to them. They uncovered the still figure. Michael's strong young body lay stretched there.

His second work for that night had begun. . .

He straightened himself, and looked at the clock on the wall. It was —— The clock was beginning to circle. He clenched his teeth against the dizziness that was taking him. It wouldn't do! It wouldn't do! There was still the arm. . . He felt himself gripped firmly. . . It passed again. He smiled at the ward Sister reassuringly. She was holding a glass. He had told her to have it in readiness, just in case. He drank slowly, and then sat down for a minute. Thank God, these two didn't panic. . . He looked at the tray in which the splinters were laid, and then at the crushed thing that was Michael's left arm. . .

It had to be done. . .

They wheeled the silent form out into the corridor and stayed waiting. Thornton came out. He took off his gloves and mask. Perspiration was running down his face.

"I'm tremendously grateful to you two. You're splendid!"

They smiled. There was a look of immense relief about them. The ward Sister told him frankly that she wouldn't have done it for anyone else, but himself; she hadn't felt nervous, once he'd started.

"Padre, you're not looking too good."

It was that whack on the head, he said, nothing more.

"What happens now?" she asked; the procedure was all rather confusing. Thornton told her the patient would now come under ordinary routine, and whoever was the doctor of her ward. He gave her one or two directions for preventing Michael turning on the stump of his arm. The danger of septicaemia was remote; her patient was healthy and blood condition excellent. He assumed there would be the usual

anti-tetanus, etc. He would see the doctor in the morning, and have an unprofessional look at —— He nodded at the still figure.

“Oh Padre, what a night!”

It had been fairly ghastly, he agreed.

“God bless you, my dears. Good night.”

He watched them wheeling him away, his lips suddenly twitching.

Michael had lost an arm.

There had been nothing else for it.

He would have given worlds to save it.

But no surgeon in the world could have saved it.

He went slowly into the little room opposite the operating theatre, and began changing.

He stood on the steps for a moment, and looked at his watch. After half-past one.

There were still groups of firemen standing about. Their work seemed to be over more or less. He went across. The same man was still there with whom he had spoken earlier on. He was folding and packing the asbestos suits now.

“Morning, sir. ‘Ow’s that young ‘Elier? Saw you looking after ‘im.”

Thornton told him Helier’s arm had had to be amputated and that he would be in the hospital for a month or two.

“Sorry to ‘ear that, sir . . . Like young ‘Elier, I do. Calls us all mates, and ‘e ain’t one of us really, if you know ‘ow I mean.”

Thornton smiled.

“Saved that kid, that’s what they reckon.”

Yes, Michael had saved that dark-eyed mite . . . And lost an arm . . . He looked at the frontage of the north wing outlined in the dimness of the summer night, the black cavity in the centre, the smaller cavity where the section of the wall had come down.

“Finished all right,” the fireman gave his opinion.

It was. Finished like a thousand other things were finished by this war.

"Well, good night, mate."

The fireman pushed his helmet back:

"Gorblimey. All mates nowadays. Night, mate!"

Thornton smiled and went off.

At the end of the road the barrier had been removed. The crowd had long ago dispersed. The city was silent as the tomb. He walked on aware that his legs were none too steady. He kept at it for some minutes. He certainly wasn't too good. He reached the street that led to the monastery. Half way down it he came to an abrupt halt.

Gabrielle?

He had completely forgotten in the midst of all that concentration. Gabrielle up at the Cumberland, unaware of what had happened. Michael had been going up there to-morrow. She would have to know. He must —

His hand went out, and found a wall. The pavement was moving under his feet. He fumbled for something to hold, felt a sill, and held on. This was . . . Dark masses that were buildings leaned at him and went back. . . A mist was trying to descend. . . It wouldn't do! It wouldn't do! He fought with every ounce of his will. . .

The buildings came to a standstill as the mist lifted. He drew a long breath, and wiped his streaming face.

Where was the hospital?

No, the monastery. He had to get back to the monastery. He started again, with his hand touching along the wall. It gave him confidence.

Gabrielle?

Something about Gabrielle.

Things were clearer now. He was walking better.

This was —

"Hullo, Padre."

"Hullo, Michael."

No, Michael wasn't —

He knew this street. . . It was round the corner. Hang on to the railings. Keep on to the door. . . Fine. . . Yoicks!

"Michael, do the best firemen . . ."

That was Michael going round the corner with the fire-ladder. Michael was strong. . .

Here he was, coming up. . . Put the coat under him. . . Like this, with the hand flat. . .

No, the door . . . Hold on! . . . Go along to the Chapel. They'd left on the lights in the Ward. That was Michael. "I'm not going to hurt you, Michael" . . . The saw . . . Dear God, don't let me make a mistake. He's had so much of it . . . so much of it. . .

Hullo, mate. We're all mates. . .

The lay-brother stared at the open door.

He had closed it last night, he could remember doing so. He put it to, went along the corridor to the Sacristy, and emerged with a lighted taper.

At the door into the Chapel he stopped, staring again. He had closed this one too, and it was open. He went inside the Chapel and looked about. Everything seemed as usual. . .

And then he saw the figure lying stretched there, before the altar, with a ray of sunlight resting on the face. . .

## CHAPTER XXVII

SIR JOHN spread the map out flat, and frowned over it thoughtfully. It was a map of the Hollingham estate. He consulted a letter marked "Official" and dated July 5th, 1942. Then studied the map again.

A hundred acres? Cultivation of crops?

He decided to send for Williams.

When Williams appeared he was given the letter marked "Official" to read. Having handed it back he proceeded to rub his cheek non-committally.

"Well, Sir John, it's what they're doing now. It ain't my place to give an opinion, but if you asked me I'd say it was the right thing."

"Right thing be damned! Land Army! Pack of bitches runnin' about the place ———"

"John dear, may I come in?"

"Hurumph . . . Come in, my dear."

Lady St. Laurence fluttered in cheerfully, smiling at Williams who stood aside.

"My dear, such good news! They're transferring Gabrielle to the Land Army."

Sir John started. His face went a healthy pink.

"I knew you'd be pleased, John."

Williams caressed the corners of his mouth. She gave Sir John the letter she was holding. He did some business with his pince-nez, wiping the glasses, before adjusting them.

"Land Army, eh?"

He read it through. Gabrielle, it seemed, had seen the appeal for women to join up for work on the land, had approached her C.O. on the matter, and pointed out that she would be more in her element on the land. The C.O. had been reluctant at first, but had finally sent in her name for transference. She had been

accepted and was now waiting for further orders. The letter ended, "I'm sorry, but Michael refuses to let me tell you what really happened that night at the hospital."

He handed it back with an "Um." His eyes fell on the "Official" communication. He picked it up.

"Better have a look at that, my dear."

She glanced through it. There were puckers on her forehead when the significance of it broke upon her. Then suddenly her face was beaming.

"Why John, this is positively providential!"

"Providential, eh?"

She read: "Landowners complying with this request will be free to exercise their preference in choice of workers, providing this is done in consultation with local authority!"

Their eyes met.

Sir John contemplated Williams.

"Does my daughter know a cow when she sees one?"

"Miss Gabrielle? Well, she knows more about a horse, Sir John."

"Does she know anything about crops?"

"I reckon she'd soon pick it up, under instruction."

Sir John considered. His eyes met his wife's again. She remarked cheerfully:

"Well, it seems to settle itself. How wonderful!"

"The deuce it does! Who's going to work it?"

She kissed the top of his head.

"John dear, you're so good at that."

He studied the map again.

"Patriotic thing to do, I suppose. Never did like women playing at soldiers. Some sense in doing a bit on the land. That so, Williams?"

Williams agreed that it was. Sir John told him to come back later and they'd go through the estate map together; he was to regard the matter as confidential for the present. Williams turned at the door with, "Excuse me, Sir John, but any more news of Mr. Michael?" Sir John told him there was. Young St. Helier was being released, incapacitated for Service, and

would be returning to Hollingham. Williams' face lit up.

"Like old times again, Sir. I'm glad to 'ear that."

"Can you do with a one-armed gardener?"

"If it's Mr. Michael, I could, Sir. I reckon he'll do more with his one arm than most of 'em with two." Williams hesitated. "E's not said anything more about 'ow it 'appened?"

"'Argument with a wall,' if that's any good to you, Williams."

Williams admitted it didn't convey much. "Never would talk about himself, Mr. Michael — if I may make so bold." He asked whether Father Thornton was going on all right. Father Thornton had written saying he was fit and at work again, Lady St. Laurence told him.

"'Argument with a chair,'" Sir John remarked drily.

"So you said, Sir — and that don't seem to help much either." Williams bowed and retired.

Lady St. Laurence unfolded Gabrielle's letter and read aloud: "I'm sorry, but Michael refuses to let me tell you what really happened." John, what could have really happened?"

"A fire happened."

"Well, we know that. But it's all so mysterious. They don't say anything."

Sir John got his own back:

"Find out, my dear. You're so good at that."

Thornton gathered together the sheets of foolscap. He had written it all out in full, knowing just what he had to say.

He rested his chin on his hands.

Could he have written it with the same conviction if he had not been through it personally on that night at the hospital in May? He doubted it. An "incident" was a mighty different thing when you were in it, and part of it.

He had known war in the ordinary way — four years of it at the Front in the first war. This malevolence rained on cities was not war; there were no thrills or splendour in mech-

anised inhumanism. You could call it by any name you liked, you could excuse it on the ground of military necessity; the plain stark fact of it remained — it was mass-murder of civilians, women and children.

He was glad now that he had been in it that night.

To endure something of it in his own person.

He picked up his pen and wrote at the head of the first sheet the name of one of the larger London halls, the date July 12th, 1942, and beneath it the title he had chosen for his address — "The War That Will Not End War."

To-day week? His first public meeting since May.

Treves had been adamant with his "no public speaking for a month," and had threatened to expose him for an illegal operation if he disobeyed. He had argued that the matron seemed to be doing plenty of talking after a far worse concussion than his own. The matron had been put straight to bed and stayed there instead of carrying on half the night, Treves had retorted.

He probably would have been up in a day or two, instead of a week, if he'd gone straight to bed, Thornton had realised. Anyway, as it was, he had recovered remarkably quickly, considering. His only regret was the fright he had given the lay-brother, who had banged on the Abbot's door with the news that Father Anselm was lying dead in the Chapel!

He noticed a letter lying on the table and smiled. It was all very well for Gabrielle to reprimand him for backing up Michael; he could see Michael's point of view — the Demolition Squads and Fire Services were saving lives every night and losing their own; he himself had merely happened to be standing by, and had lost no more than an arm. Michael had refused to let Gabrielle say a word, and was anything but over-elated that she had found out; although for that part of it Gabrielle could hardly be blamed.

Gabrielle had done the only thing she could do, when Michael had not appeared at the Cumberland next day — phoned the N.F.S. Station to find out if anything was wrong. She

had been asked to come down to the Station, as information could not be given by phone. She had gone straight down to the City, found it, and learned about the fire. At the hospital she had been given very little, but had been allowed to see Michael for two minutes in a dazed condition after the anaesthetic; she had noticed the cradle over his left shoulder, but without appreciating its significance. She had returned to the Cumberland, understanding that Michael had helped to rescue a child and had been damaged by masonry in doing so, but no more. She had been down each day of the week to see him, with Michael looking more himself every time. He could talk and seemed fairly cheerful, but the cradle over his shoulder was still there. On the last day but one he had told her. . . It had not come as the shock that it might have, for she had guessed he was keeping something back; it was when she had returned that evening that the full realisation of it came—of what it would mean to Michael.

He had said very little at the time, and had gone on to ask her to call at the monastery and find out what was happening to the Padre—he was ill or something and couldn't come here to see him. She had done so and learned that Father Thornton was getting on well but was not allowed to see anyone yet. It had all been very mysterious and puzzling.

At the hospital next day, before going in to see Michael, she had approached the ward Sister in her den, and asked to be told the whole truth—she was engaged to Michael St. Helier, and Father Thornton was a personal friend of her own. The ward Sister had laid aside her official manner, and Gabrielle had been given the whole story of that night, with the injunction that the part about the operation was for private consumption only, but St. Helier could know it, of course.

In the ward, at Michael's bedside, she had asked him whether he knew who had operated upon him.

"I've wondered; but I'm not certain. I can remember so little." He had a vague recollection of the Padre in white bending over him just before things went black. She had

told him what she had just learned, and why Father Thornton had not put in an appearance. Michael had remained very quiet, his eyes shining. . . .

He had asked after a while how much more she knew, and listened whilst she related everything she had heard, including his act that had saved the child and nearly cost him his life. Michael had frowned heavily; she had thought for a moment it was pain.

"Look here, Gabrielle, you're to forget all about that. See?"

She had nodded at the cradle over his left shoulder: "Forget it? Michael, don't be absurd."

The ward Sister's voice had interrupted; time was up.

Gabrielle had stood up, taken Michael's face in her hands and kissed him: "You'll tell me next to forget what those marks mean." She had touched one of them on his cheek. "And that." She had laid her finger on the scar on his forehead.

"I say, Gabrielle ———"

"Michael, say good-bye nicely; you won't see me again for some time."

His expression had relaxed.

"Gabrielle, I'm awfully grateful."

But it had rather spoilt their good-bye.

She had received a letter from him two days later, scrawled in pencil, at her A.T.S. billet near Bradford, containing: "I meant what I said, Gabrielle. *Please*, will you not mention it to *anybody*." She had replied. "I shall certainly tell mother and father about it. They'll be thrilled!" Another had come from Michael. "I don't care a damn who's thrilled, and all that nonsense. I hate this kind of thing. You are *not* to mention it to a soul. Do you understand—I lost my arm in an argument with a wall, and that's all there is to it. See?"

She had written all this to the monk as well as her sympathy for himself, and her "humble gratitude" for what he had done for Michael. It had ended: "I know now what you meant by 'transfigured.' It's something written there in his face."

Thornton had written back that he was up again and seeing Michael nearly every day, who was rapidly mending; also that he inclined to think she should respect Michael's wishes; he hadn't liked them knowing at Hollingham about the airman he had saved, although he saw that couldn't be helped. Thornton had ended: "It's no good, my dear. Michael is Michael, and my advice is — leave it alone."

This last letter of hers had now come. Thornton picked it up. . . . Her mother didn't like being put off with "arguments with walls and chairs," and wanted to know what had really happened; she had told her that Michael refused to let her say. "All rather silly, isn't it? Although, in my heart of hearts I love Michael for it. I'd not have him different for the world." There was a P.S. "Michael has probably told you that he's being released, 'incapacitated,' and that he'll be back at Hollingham again, gardening. Glorious! But, oh Padre, with only one arm! . . . I'm crying. . . I didn't dare to cry before Michael when he told me."

Thornton put the letter down.

Yes, Michael had told him about going back to Hollingham; he would be fitted with an artificial arm later on. He had also remarked, "It seems rather like shirking it — safely away in the country; still I can't see what else I can do. . . Anyway, I'll not be inflicting operations — Padre, why the devil did you do it?"

He had wondered why, himself.

With concussion?

The only answer seemed to be — Michael.

He began reading through, "The War That Will Not End War."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MONK paused; his eyes rested on the sea of faces below the platform.

"... I have shown you why an International ordering of the world is necessary, and what it means. I have also shown you that no genuine International Order could exist together with national armies and private armaments—firms; the former stands for peace, the latter stand for war. With an International Army of all nations in being an act of aggression would be suicidal, and its success a virtual impossibility. In the human ordering of things there is no other way to peace. It is equally true however that the human ordering of things, which assumes that this world is ours and not God's, is the way not to peace but to chaos."

He picked up his notes, glanced at them, and put them back on the table.

"Some of you may have been wondering why I chose, 'The War That Will Not End War' for the title of this address. It is not a very encouraging title. It is being said on all sides that the very hideousness of this war will prevent another. 'Never again!' So it was said after the last war, and God knows that was hideous enough. Statesmen and politicians are repeating that 'Never again' to-day; philosophers telling us that war has now reduced itself to its own insanity; that is true. It is equally true that war has not yet reduced the world's leaders to sanity. It is not sanity to say that this war will end war. War never ended war and never could, unless it were a war that obliterated the human race. If you say that a point has been reached at which the essential sanity of the human race must assert itself, I agree—and that is what the philosophers really mean. But it is not what statesman and politicians mean when they tell us that this war must end war;

for they would be the last to tolerate a calm assertion of human reason.

"That, I know, is a strong statement to make.

"Can anyone of you here recollect any of the world's leaders demanding that the voice of the peoples should be heard, that a referendum should be put to the peoples, that the masses should be free to express themselves on the matter of war? That would be an assertion of the essential sanity of the human race, for then with one voice the peoples would declare against all war.

"That however is not the idea of the world's leaders.

"Those in power envisage peace kept by fear. They do not put it in that way, but it amounts to that when they declare that there must be no more war in the same breath with 'strongly armed nation.' Peace maintained by Power. Peace maintained by fear of Power. Peace maintained by fear.

"There will be no peace by fear. And no 'freedom from fear' we are promised. There will be no International Order whilst National Big Power is maintained. To talk of Big Powers *and* Internationalism is to talk in contradictions. 'Big Power' denotes the maintenance of armed power as against rival armed power; Internationalism denotes the maintenance, not of Big Powers, but of humanity; the replacing of Powers by the one human family.

"The very term 'Big Powers' is a menace to peace.

"Peace is a matter of values; of valuing humanity above power. There can be peace when Big Powers renounce power; for power ranges human beings against one another. Remove power and you remove the barriers that divide and hide our one common humanity.

"Are the world's leaders blind to all this? Judged by their utterances, yes. Even now they contemplate combined Big Powers maintaining peace when this war is over. I believe they sincerely intend to implement that, 'Never again.' But for how long would the Big Powers remain combined? History is littered with the corpses of well-intentioned combinations of Powers.

"I hope you will not misunderstand me; I am presenting the case against Power, not against Sovereignty; against Power that incites war, not against the sovereign rights of nations. I have never yet seen Sovereignty defined by our leaders; it means the legal supremacy of the state conferring the right to rule for the common good of the people, *not* brandishing national power—the curse of the nations to-day.

"I am pleading for Power which protects humanity against itself, not places humanity at its mercy. The *One* Power of the one human race. That One Power will be desperately needed in the future that lies ahead."

The monk paused and looked round, as though estimating his audience.

"Shall I show you why it will be needed?

"It is no secret that secret weapons are in the manufacture. You may laugh when Goebbels proclaims it. Well, don't laugh, or you may laugh too soon. On both sides scientists and chemists are developing weapons of a potency for mass-destruction by the side of which landmines will seem mere child's play. Whether this war will see the use of these weapons depends on how long it will last. It is now but a matter of time. So also is the release of atomic energy with the vast potentialities contained. I am divulging no official secrets in stating that an atomic weapon of almost incredible disintegrating force may before long find its place in the armaments of nations. I am not romancing. A war-weapon of this nature is not a mere possibility, but a probability, at the present rate of research and development.

"That is why United Power will be essential in the future that lies ahead. A disunited world of national Powers and rivalries would be impotent to save itself from self-destruction. Nothing less than United Power could eliminate such weapons of mass-destruction. And there will be no other way than by elimination if the world is to be saved from itself.

"The last thing I am going to say is this:

"Supposing the world by its own efforts were to succeed in establishing an International Order, would that of itself suffice

for the maintenance of permanent peace? Could humanity of itself secure its future? Could human beings left to themselves determine the world?

"That question is being answered already in the cynicisms and doubts freely expressed as to a World Order actually coming into being. Why do so many entertain this attitude towards something that human reason perceives clearly to be the only possible way to avert war? Because they reckon upon human nature as it is. And they are right. Human beings as they are and by themselves would be impotent to maintain United Order in this pitifully weak world of human nature. They are wrong however in assuming the policy of despair which underlies the cynicisms and doubts. That policy is the policy of the Godless.

"I said that the dictum of the philosophers was true; that a point had been reached in human folly when the essential sanity of the human race must assert itself; otherwise the world must perish of its madness. Unfortunately philosophers approved by the press appear incapable of thinking beyond that. We are not told how the essential sanity is to assert itself. As usual the approved philosophers stop short when confronted by something awkward—the compelling need of a fixed and recognized code of moral law.

"Human sanity is the right use of human reason, of rationality; and the first rational act of human beings is to recognise and acknowledge their Creator, without which they will never obey His moral law, and without obeying it remain incompetent to assert human reason rightly. There will be no assertion of essential sanity without God, no International Order worth the while, no lasting peace, no hope of ending war."

The monk paused again and looked around him.

"I should imagine there is every kind of person in this audience. Some of you are Catholics, the rest of any religion or none; some of you are here out of curiosity drawn by an arresting title. I assume however that all of you are sincere, that you sincerely want to see an end of war."

He looked at the reporters seated at the table below the platform.

"I shall be agreeably surprised if what I am going to say in conclusion appears in your papers. It will not be what the press considers good copy.

"There are few of you in this hall who have not suffered in some way in this war. Some of you however may not have experienced the full horror of it.

"I was in a London hospital when it received a direct hit followed by incendiaries which virtually demolished a large wing. There was a heavy roll of casualties. Some were killed instantly by the explosion, others trapped and burned to death, some died later, many were maimed for life. They were all of them patients in the wards. None of them were responsible for this war, yet all of them were victims of the war. That is what modern war means—the slaughter of the innocent. And that is only one of thousands of similar massacres which are the lot of the innocent of half the world, continuing daily and nightly, because of a few who are out for Power. And that is but a foretaste of what is coming if the struggle for Power continues. Again, I am not romancing, I am stating a sober fact. That is what Power means when human sanity is not asserted against it.

"And that struggle for Power will continue if human nature is left to itself, as it will be left to itself, if the world leaves its Creator alone. No human endeavour can arrest it that dispenses with God and His moral law.

"I have no desire to inflict piety on you. I am appealing to your sanity and rationality.

"Would one thinking being amongst you confidently subscribe to the shibboleth that because God is silent we can discount Him? Certainly He is silent to a world that is silent to Him; don't let that shibboleth delude you. He will speak when the world speaks to Him. And don't imagine that we can get away with it when we ignore the Creator of heaven and earth.

"Does this war look like getting away with it? Does it

look like getting away with it in the future, whatever the outcome of this war? We cannot end war without the Omnipotent. We have the choice of accepting Him, or refusing Him.

"If you tell me those who make or mar the world are Godless, I answer let the world choose leaders who are not. Our leaders are chosen from ourselves. If we ourselves are Godless, we shall get the leaders we deserve. If we ourselves are on our knees, so also will our leaders be on theirs. It comes down to you and me, the ordinary people of this world."

"May I say this?

"To kneel before God is not to kneel before a tyrant, but before Eternal Love. Before Someone Who, looking down in pity on us, came down from His throne in heaven, took upon Himself our human nature and became Man; Someone, to Whom all is present; Someone Who, in the Garden of His Agony, two thousand years ago, accepted a cup containing all the anguish of this war and drank of that cup to the dregs, enduring unto death the hideousness He never made; but Who did make dawn and sunset, stars and sunlight, and songs of birds, and flowers.

"And Whose everlasting arms still hold this world."

## CHAPTER XXIX

**N**O GABRIELLE.

The same Hollingham. Peace and old world dignity. The July glory of the garden that Williams had faithfully kept up, or there'd be a murder when Mr. Michael returned. The elms and the tinkling stream. The great cedar, lawns and Rockery; the vista of stately oaks in the Park beyond. Michael's cottage swept and garnished for his arrival this morning.

In the fields to the south from which Thornton had just returned, men were driving in posts and wiring off the acres for the land-girls due at billets in the village to-morrow. Michael, an empty sleeve stuck in his pocket, was moving about shrubs and borders, inspecting, planning out what had to be done. Thornton saw Sir John and Lady St. Laurence appearing on the terrace where an aged footman was laying out tea. Everything very much the same. Even Michael's robin hopping about him—if it was the same; anyhow the robin seemed to know him.

But no Gabrielle. Hollingham was somehow incomplete without her. She was part of its loveliness and she wasn't here. The war again.

It was difficult to believe it down here—that yesterday he had been saying all that to a war-weary audience in London. He hadn't known that Michael was there until afterwards, when a young man looking rather strange in civvies with a sleeve dangling had presented himself behind the scenes, his eyes alight: "Padre, that was great! Will they print it?"

It was Michael who had insisted on him coming down with him, and the Abbot who had ordered him a break. He had sent a wire to Lady St. Laurence and they had travelled down together this morning. In the train he had gathered that Michael was looking for his moral support in the event of ques-

tions about the Air Force, or the arm. He had remembered Gabrielle's difficulty with her mother who didn't like being "put off." Lady St. Laurence was undoubtedly the danger-point.

Sir John, minus a chauffeur, had met them himself at the station with the car. Lady St. Laurence had been waiting in the hall. They had greeted Michael like a long-lost son. Beyond "My poor boy!" once or twice from Lady St. Laurence, the preliminaries had been free of embarrassment. At lunch conversation had turned on the reports in the press of the speech; apparently his challenge had been accepted, for in some cases his concluding words were printed in full. Michael had kept them at the speech through the meal, partly, Thornton guessed, to direct attention away from himself; he was still awkward with his one arm. Sir John's comment had been that in his day a monk would have been pelted off the platform if he attempted to put the fear of God into the British public. Lady St. Laurence had asked how London had liked it. "London can take it!" Michael had exclaimed exuberantly. Thornton had suggested that an audience of two or three thousand was hardly London, but agreed that they had taken it. Lady St. Laurence was not quite sure what "taking it" meant. "Sitting pheasant, my dear, sitting pheasant," Sir John had explained. Thornton had demurred that he scarcely regarded his audiences as sitting pheasants.

The aged footman was coming down the stone pathway; Thornton went down the Rockery steps to meet him.

"Tea is served on the terrace, Father."

"Thank you, Simmons."

Thornton asked him how he was. Simmons said he was keeping well, thank you, but they were very short of staff; the younger footmen had all been called up. He indicated a figure stooping over a flower-bed.

"Like old times, Father, with Mr. Michael back." They were all of them very sorry about the arm. "In a fire, Father, so I'm told?" Yes, it was in a fire, Thornton said, and then

rather hastily, "Well now, tea." Simmons bowed and returned to the house.

He called to Michael and they went up to the terrace together. Michael was a member of the family to-day; tomorrow he would revert to the gardener.

Tea proved somewhat difficult.

Thornton remarked that he had been to see the fields being marked off for the land-girls, and was given particulars of the scheme by Sir John. He noticed Lady St. Laurence moving a small table nearer Michael with his cup on it suggesting that it would make it easier for him, "Poor boy." She led up to it gradually, "It must have been so trying at first, Michael." Michael shrugged and said he was getting used to one arm already. She murmured, "Yes, of course. . . I've been reading all about the firemen, what a terrible life it must be." Michael said, "Oh, a bit hectic at times." She ventured, "And they suffer such dreadful injuries?" Michael replied, "Oh well, it's all in the day's luck." She tried, "They say it's the falling masonry that is so dangerous?" . . . "That's right. You've got to keep a look-out." Michael picked up his tea and had a drink. Her eyes were on his empty sleeve. "Michael dear, do tell us how it really happened. We've heard so little." Thornton saw the frown appear on his forehead. "Oh, the way these things do happen. Wall came down, you know." It didn't satisfy her. "You hadn't time to get out of the way, something like that?" "That's the idea," Michael said quickly. He stood up and began handing a cake-dish round. Lady St. Laurence subsided into silence.

Thornton made a diplomatic move and took Michael's place next her whilst he launched into a discussion of the garden with Sir John. "You'll have some more tea, Father Thornton?" He handed his cup. "It must have been a terrible night? Gabrielle says the hospital is half destroyed." Thornton admitted it had not been a pleasant night. "And you're really yourself again? A chair, wasn't it?" He'd had a scrap with a chair, yes; but he was all right again. She looked slightly disengaged, but tried again; "They seem to have made a great suc-

cess of the operation." She nodded in the direction of Michael. Thornton agreed that the operation had been a success, and led her away from it with, "Michael's a magnificent constitution; that's half the battle, you know." She supposed it must be his constitution, seeing what he had been through, first Dunkirk, then saving the airman, and now this arm; it was wonderful what some men could go through: "And his face really doesn't show much now; just those lines." Thornton kept her to Michael's face and the wonders of plastic surgery. . . "Still, it was sad his having to leave the Air Force." There was a pause. "I never have been able to understand it quite." Thornton pointed out hastily that it was a severe shock to the nervous system, rescuing someone from a furnace and getting badly burnt in the process; Michael was better out of it. She digested it. "Yes, I suppose so. . . And then he becomes a fireman and goes into fires again?" Thornton wondered desperately what the answer was to that. He decided on: "One can't choose in war-time, unfortunately. . . Michael's a good head for heights." He described Michael on his fire-ladder, up there for an hour without turning a hair. It was successful and caught her attention. "Well, I think he's wonderful . . . even if it is all rather mysterious."

Thornton saw his chance and switched off on to Gabrielle and the A.T.S. "I imagine she's in it for the duration now?" Lady St. Laurence said nothing, but sat there smiling to herself. There seemed to be a lull in the discussion of the garden. She remarked, raising her voice without looking up: "John dear, will Gabrielle be in the A.T.S. for the duration?" Sir John gave a tremendous "Hurrumph" and then: "Never know, my dear. Transfer 'em sometimes." They both sat smiling to themselves.

"What's the mystery?" Thornton asked. Michael awakened to it:

"What's this? Gabrielle's not leaving the A.T.S.?"

Lady St. Laurence murmured cryptically:

"The world is full of surprises."

Michael studied her for a moment:

"Well, I'm certain she's not; she'd have told me."

She remarked to her husband:

"It's all rather mysterious, John, isn't it?"

Michael looked from one to the other.

"Kind of joke?"

"Damn good joke," Sir John replied.

Michael's eyes met Thornton's. The joke didn't seem particularly good to either of them, or even funny. They couldn't even see what it was about.

Lady St. Laurence murmured, "Well now" and something about having to get on with things.

Shortly after dinner that evening, whilst they were in the drawing-room, Lady St. Laurence was called to the telephone. She returned after five minutes, humming to herself happily.

"It's quite all right, John dear. It's all been arranged beautifully."

"Fixed up, eh?"

"Perfectly. She's delighted. I've told her she'll have Gabrielle's room."

She sat down and resumed her knitting.

"One of these land-girls," she explained for the benefit of Thornton and Michael.

"Oh yes," said Michael.

"Quite," said Thornton.

Michael went on turning over the pages of an illustrated paper. He looked up:

"Gabrielle's room? One of the posh type?"

Lady St. Laurence considered.

"Yes, I should think so. Her voice sounds —— 'posh'."

"Got to billet these young things, y'know," from Sir John. "Patriotic and all that."

At breakfast next morning Thornton was handed a newspaper by Sir John: "Someone on your tracks, Padre." It was a letter in the correspondence columns.

"Sir, without wishing to raise religious controversy, may I be allowed to express my belief that the speech by the Rev. Anselm Thornton, reported in your columns this morning, can do little good and a considerable amount of harm. To threaten the British public with the vengeance of God is hardly calculated to uphold the public morale so vital to the nation at this time.  
Freethinker."

There was a second letter beneath, almost as brief:

"Sir, I read with gratitude your report of Father Anselm Thornton's speech. I happened to be present at the meeting myself, and should like to bear tribute to its effect upon his audience. I think we all of us went away, not merely intellectually enlightened, but spiritually strengthened by the remembrance of a God Who, in Father Thornton's words, has 'endured unto death the hideousness He never made' and 'Whose everlasting arms still hold this world.' Slogans such as 'London can take it' may help the war-weary superficially, but I am inclined to think that Father Thornton's reminder of Eternal Love, of 'Someone Who made dawn and sunset, stars and sunlight, and songs of birds, and flowers,' is of more fundamental value to public morale than proclaiming our own capacity to endure.  
Thinker."

After breakfast Thornton went to the little study allocated as usual for his private use, and wrote a reply to the Publishing Office of the paper for its correspondence columns:

"Sir, May I thank 'Thinker' for answering 'Freethinker,' thereby saving me the necessity of doing so.  
Anselm Thornton."

He put down his pen.

Two men. One of them insincere, judging by the malicious twist given to his words; the other sincerely acknowledging his own need and that of millions. One opposing any interference

by the Creator, the other recognising the world's helplessness left to itself.

Pride and blindness.

Humility and vision.

He went to the window and opened it wide to the glory of the July morning. The long shadows of the cedar lay upon the terrace. The lawns were a sparkle of dew in the early sun. It was the day of Michael's return to the status of gardener.

He had asked him last night how he felt about it. Michael had replied that he was happy enough getting back to the gardening, but not about being released whilst others had to carry on. It plainly troubled him that he could no longer do his bit. Thornton had suggested that he'd been sufficiently battered. Michael, however, seemed indifferent to that aspect of it. He always had been indifferent to his own injuries.

Only once had Thornton ventured to hint that he had done anything out of the way, and that was whilst he was still in the hospital. The distress that had come into the dark eyes and his sharp, "Padre, please don't," had warned Thornton not to attempt it again; Michael was having nothing of that kind. He disliked it being known here at Hollingham that he had saved an airman's life. Sir John had introduced the subject in a roundabout way last night. Michael had instantly asked him: "I'm sorry, Sir John, but may we keep off that?"

In any one else it might have been a pose, this insistence on silence about himself. Michael couldn't pose if he tried. He detested any reference to those acts. His body however bore its mute witness — the long scar on the forehead, the lines still left on his face, the empty sleeve.

Michael, who had chosen to save and not to kill.

He could never have done these things but for that change in him, of that Thornton was morally certain. The Michael who had panicked at the sight of a boat capsizing, could never have made himself do things invested with far worse horrors than drowning, had not the egocentrism that had been his undoing first been ruthlessly suppressed. He had gone straight

ahead from that moment, along the road of self-crucifixion.

He would continue to do these things if they came his way. He was "like that" now, Gabrielle had called it.

Thornton found himself wondering.

He had never quite been able to picture Michael married, with his intense individualism and inclination to solitude. His love for Gabrielle was not passionate; though he loved her passionately. It was deep and enduring, as spiritual as it was physical. She was everything to him in her innate self-effacing goodness, just as he was everything to her. She understood him and wouldn't have him different—his spiritualised outlook. It was that understanding of him that would carry them through life together. There was the rare quality of depth in their love that had already stood the test of the long wait imposed by circumstances.

Michael had taken him to his cottage after tea yesterday. It was all spick and span and ready for him—the same hard wooden chairs in the sitting-room and the plain wooden bedstead in the bedroom. For the first time the cottage had conveyed a sense of loneliness. And it wasn't in the cottage but in Michael's presence there. A remark of his had conveyed it even more. Sir John, it appeared, was giving him and Gabrielle one of the wings of Hollingham for their own use when they married. Michael had made the statement looking out of the window with his back to the room, and then added with a sudden break in his voice: "It's not going to be easy, Padre." Thornton had not been quite sure what he meant for a moment. "Easy?" Michael had explained jerkily that whilst in the Services he had been reconciled more or less to waiting for Gabrielle; it was anything but easy now that he was free and back at Hollingham; and heaven only knew when the war would end. It was after that week when she had come to see him every day at the hospital that he had felt it so keenly—the prospect of another long wait.

Thornton had given him all his sympathy. He understood only too well. Everything at Hollingham would remind him of her; he had never known Hollingham without her. Michael

must inevitably feel it here, away from the absorption of his recent life. He looked at the flushed face turned to him with the pathetic lines showing up as they did when he coloured; Michael rarely expressed his feelings for Gabrielle like this. It was his very human longing for her that he was unable to suppress. Thornton had asked him somewhat irrelevantly:

"What was the 'damn good joke' just now?"

"Sir John? I don't know, Padre. Something about Gabrielle they're keeping to themselves."

Thornton asked if he'd made anything of it; Sir John and Lady St. Laurence had seemed to hint that Gabrielle might be transferred from the A.T.S.

"Transferred to what? She'd have told me."

Perhaps that was the joke, Thornton suggested — that she hadn't.

"Why shouldn't she?"

"I've no notion. I'm only surmising from the way they put it. They seemed to find it funny."

"There's nothing funny in being transferred — if it is that."

Thornton confessed he could see nothing funny himself.

"The world is full of surprises," he quoted Lady St. Lawrence.

Which meant anything or nothing, Michael replied.

"Or something," Thornton murmured musingly. "Funny things do happen, of course."

That had been yesterday. Last night Michael had spent his hour in the Chapel; this morning he had made his Communion and served the monk's Mass. His life here was going to be as it had been. In the sacristy afterwards before going down to the cottage for his breakfast Michael had asked him: "Say a prayer for me, Padre. You know what I mean."

Yes. He knew what Michael meant, and had done so. It was going to be the hard road again. No Gabrielle. Carrying on with the gardening and the work of production hampered by the loss of his arm. Feeling it that he could no longer do his bit in the Services. Knowing that he was out of it. Lonely,

for all his love of solitude. He was human and he was young. . .

Thornton glanced at the letter he had written, lying on the table. He picked it up and in the act of placing it in an envelope, paused.

He had caught sight of Michael coming across the lawn below the terrace, a spade and a digging fork tucked under his arm. He watched him make his way towards the elms, looking about him. Michael stopped at some loose soil, manoeuvred with his hand and laid down the fork retaining his hold on the spade. He chose a spot, drove the spade into the soil with his foot, and then remained still, considering. He placed his toe against the back of the spade and pulled on the handle. It wasn't successful apparently. There was another pause for consideration. He drove in the spade again, stood to the left, placed his foot sideways to it, and then tried with his weight on the handle. The soil gave too suddenly and he nearly overbalanced. The next attempt was better, and the sod came up cleanly. He got down to it with more confidence, driving in the spade and thrusting down the handle with his weight, using his foot for a lever. . . After a while he left the spade standing and picked up the fork. . .

Michael facing life again, crippled, getting down to it uncomplainingly with one arm. . .

And somewhere a tiny mite alive and toddling, for whom he had done it . . . , and, because he had done it, was like this. . .

At tea that afternoon Lady St. Laurence remarked, in the absence of their gardener:

"We've reserved a little surprise for Michael."

Thornton asked her to tell him. She replied that he would know in good time and "It's all rather mysterious, isn't it?"

She and Sir John seemed to be in a state of mild excitement.

"Is this the 'damn good joke'?"

Sir John said Thornton should decide for himself.

"When's it coming off?"

Sir John smiled enigmatically and asked his wife, who was also smiling enigmatically, for more tea. There was certainly something in the air.

"All rather mysterious," Lady St. Laurence repeated pointedly. There was no mistaking it this time. If he and Michael were mysterious about things, they were going to be too.

Half an hour later Thornton went down to the village, posted letters and bought some tobacco. He returned by way of the Beech Avenue. Some way up to the house he heard a car coming behind him. He stepped aside to let it pass, and caught a glimpse of a figure sitting at the back, but no more. A moment later it occurred to him that it must be the land-girl whom they were billeting at Hollingham; he had had an impression of a land-girl's uniform. The car swept round the curve of the Avenue further on.

He reached the house to find the aged Simmons carrying in a couple of suitcases and a haversack, and the car leaving. There was no sign of the occupant; she must have already gone in. Thornton passed through the hall. Simmons, somewhat overloaded, was ascending the stairs. Thornton ran up after him and took possession of a suitcase and the haversack with "Lead on, Simmons," to the protesting butler. "Nice, having her back again, Father." Thornton following him up agreed, slightly puzzled. Back again? Outside Gabrielle's room on the first floor where Simmons halted he put down the suitcase and the haversack. "The land-girl, isn't it? She's been here before, then?" Simmons looked nonplussed and then smiled: "You would have your little joke, Father." Joke? Thornton was unaware of it. "Who'd have thought it, a lady like her one of them land-girls!" Thornton said, "Well, war-time, you know," and remarked that he hadn't yet met her. Simmons stared as though this time the joke were beyond him. He smiled politely, picked up the bags and went inside with them. Thornton returned down the stairs, undecided as to whether Simmons or himself were going mental. In the hall the draw-

ing-room door was partly open. He heard voices and laughter inside as he passed it.

In the study, after filling his pouch and from it his pipe with the only tobacco the village could supply, he lit it and sat down in a mechanical absent-minded way. Whether it was the stimulus of the somewhat full-flavoured shag, or Simmons' polite smile, or Sir John's "damn good joke," his mind was suddenly racing...

"Surprise for Michael"?

"One of these land-girls"?

"Gabrielle's room"?

"The world is full of \_\_\_\_\_"?

He sat back, his eyes alight.

"Good heavens! . . . Of all the dull \_\_\_\_\_"

He began laughing to himself. . .

He was still laughing to himself when a tap came on the door.

"Yes?"

The door opened. A maid-servant, red in the face and trying not to laugh, said tremulously:

"If you please, Father, there's a young lady would like to see you," and disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

Thornton relit his pipe, with the corners of his mouth twitching. He waited a moment, and then called:

"Come in, Gabrielle."

## CHAPTER XXX

**I**N THE cool of the July evening, three hours later, the monk was sitting in the little summer-house near the Rockery contemplating the turn of events.

It was amazing what could happen in three hours. He was still feeling slightly bewildered. Two facts however stood out clearly. A problem had been solved. It was equally, if painfully, clear that he and Michael had been gloriously done.

There was no escaping it. They had both of them failed ignominiously to see through it—even the telephone call last night. Sir John and Lady St. Laurence had thrown out hints, but the “damn good joke” hadn’t penetrated. “Gabrielle’s room” should have told them; they hadn’t even given it a thought.

And had failed to see anything funny.

It had been funny enough however for the family.

In the study, Gabrielle, following her staged entry, had subjected him to a triumphant elucidation of the family scheme for keeping Michael and himself in the dark. He had listened with what dignity he could muster, and then:

“You confess to employing your own misguided parents for the purpose of victimising a respectable clergyman and a humble gardener?”

She had confessed to it delightedly. He had next done his best to assume a critical manner and expressed doubts as to whether Michael would recognise an “officially appointed land-girl” in the perfectly tailored apparition sitting opposite. “I take it this sartorial triumph indicates a lady land-girl?”

“Well, Michael’s a gentleman-gardener.”

He had advised her to walk boldly down the garden, present herself to that young man, and tell him who she was and what

she was. There had been no need however. A voice had come through the open window:

"Hullo, Padre!"

Michael had seen him from outside and was coming across the terrace. Thornton had buried his face in his hands and waited for the bombshell.

"What's the big idea?" Michael's voice had asked. He was standing there, leaning on a rake.

"Saying my prayers. Go away, or you'll get what's coming to you."

Gabrielle had said from the background:

"Michael, aren't you pleased to see me?"

Michael had started. He had come nearer. For a moment he had stared incredulously.

"Gabrielle! . . . Yoicks!"

He had dropped the rake and climbed in over the windowsill. Gabrielle had risen. Next moment he was standing before her in a state of amazement.

"Good heavens! Is it leave, or what? . . . You never wrote."

"I telephoned."

"Telephoned? When?"

"Last night, Michael dear."

Michael had looked bewildered, running his fingers through his hair. His eyes met Thornton's:

"There was only one call last night? That was the land-girl. . . What's the joke, you two? . . . Oh?"

Gabrielle's uniform had suddenly arrested his attention.

"But ——" He remained still, taking her in. "Then you have been transferred?"

She had nodded: "Clever Michael."

Comprehension had dawned. He had stared at her again and then begun laughing. He could see the humour of it for all that the two of them had been completely and ignominiously taken in.

"Well, I'm ——"

His eyes had gone to Thornton:

"Dirty work, Padre?"

"Dirty work," Thornton had agreed. "Don't like it."

Michael had challenged her in an endeavour to retrieve the situation:

"You got your father to wangle it?"

"On the contrary," she had replied sweetly, "my father worked it himself with complete success."

"Oh?" Michael had stuck. "What's the answer to that, Padre?"

"You don't answer. She's taking advantage of your politeness."

Michael had studied the uniform again.

"Of course, Gabrielle —— Well, would you have known, Padre?"

Thornton had endeavoured to look intelligent:

"One deduces it. Assuming Gabrielle to be the land-girl, one concludes that the uniform is that of a land-girl."

"It's the breeches," Michael had decided. "Too gentlemanly."

He had assumed genial acceptance of the situation:

"Well, nice to have you about the place, Gabrielle." He beamed upon her graciously. "I'll show you round the garden some time."

She had wrinkled her nose in disgust:

"I think you're odious. I'll not marry you."

Michael had glanced at the breeches again, with:

"As one gentleman to another, I doubt if the best gardeners marry into the Land Army."

She had stuck. "What's the answer to that, Padre?"

"You don't answer. He's taking advantage of your politeness."

Gabrielle had removed Michael's empty sleeve from his pocket and put it round her neck.

"Michael, you've not kissed me yet."

"Oh, sorry." He put his face down. "Excuse me, Padre, one has to observe the formalities."

She smacked the face and they kissed.

"Excuse me," Thornton said, "one has to observe the formalities."

He had climbed out over the window sill and left them to themselves in the study. On the terrace he had encountered Sir John and Lady St. Laurence, who smiled benignly at him.  
"You wicked people!"

At dinner he and Michael had been subjected by the family to further unfavourable reflections upon their astuteness. Lady St. Laurence had sat quietly enjoying it all until Michael had asked what the idea of the "hush-hush" had been and received a dig from her in return: "But we thought you liked 'hush-hush,' Michael dear." He had coloured but had taken it with a hesitating grin. "Well, Padre?" from Sir John. "Damn good joke?" Thornton had replied cryptically that his respect for Gabrielle wouldn't allow him to call it that; the uniform would no doubt tone down.

It was Michael who, towards the end of dinner, had raised the subject of the monk's speech. Gabrielle had asked him what he was referring to.

"It was in the papers. Yesterday," he informed her. She hadn't read a paper yesterday and listened whilst he described the meeting, his voice taking on a note of excitement. He had produced from his pocket a newspaper cutting and pointed to a headline, "Monk on the future of war," and told her to read the first paragraph. She had studied it for a minute, with her forehead puckering.

"An 'atomic weapon'? But, it sounds horrible."

Michael had shot out cynically:

"Bigger and better bombs! They'll certify an airman for refusing to drop them!"

Gabrielle had looked up quickly. Her eyes had caught the monk's. Sir John had regarded Michael curiously for a moment.

Afterwards, when Sir John had joined his wife in the draw-

ing-room, Michael and Gabrielle, their manner suddenly conspiratorial, had inveigled the monk into the study. There was an undercurrent of excitement about them.

Michael, his colour rising, but without any preliminary coughing, had announced that they were going to get married as soon as possible. They had stood there hand in hand like two children, as they had stood there once before on the evening they had told him they were engaged, a quiet radiant happiness in their eyes. The monk had smiled in silence for a moment and then said simply: "God bless you, my dears. I'm so glad" . . .

"It's to be here at Hollingham, in the Chapel," Gabrielle told him. "And of course you're to do it."

"All fixed, Padre," he was informed by Michael.

The monk had laughed. They certainly had not wasted time. There would be one or two formalities to be observed and matters settled, etc., beforehand, he suggested—if they were not averse. . .

A consultation had ensued.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the monk had taken a note-book from his pocket and entered a date, agreed upon provisionally, for the end of August.

Michael had asked, "What happens next?"

"One approaches the parents," Gabrielle decided.

"Which one?"

"This one," she said firmly. "Or you'll bungle things." She regarded him doubtfully. "Michael, you nearly bungled it just now. Did you know that?"

His eyebrows lifted:

"How do you mean?"

"A remark you made."

"What remark?"

"Something about airmen who refuse . . ."

"Oh, that? Well, I meant it. What's the harm?"

"The parents aren't supposed to know why you left the Air Force."

Michael became serious. He began rubbing his chin.

"I see. Yes, it might have ——" He was suddenly staring at her. "I say, Gabrielle, you don't ——"

"Yes, I do," she cut in. "You didn't expect me to believe the official version? I'm not a fool."

"You mean —— You've heard something, or what?"

He turned to Thornton, anxiety in his eyes. The monk said quietly:

"Why not tell him, Gabrielle?"

She took Michael by the lapels of his jacket:

"I used common sense, my dear. You needn't imagine it was the Padre. He gave me the official version of course, but I refused to be put off. You were never going to do the bombing, I knew that and told him so. It was easy enough to see what had happened, and he couldn't lie and deny it."

Michael remained still for a moment.

"Sorry, Gabrielle. . . I don't mind you knowing of course; but it mustn't get about. I gave the Wing Commander my word of honour."

"I understand that."

She studied him.

"You knew beforehand what would happen?"

"Oh yes, I knew."

"Were you court-martialed?"

"No." He glanced at Thornton. "No, I was kept under arrest until I — left."

"Oh Michael, how hateful!"

He pursed his lips:

"I don't know that I'd call it hateful. There's nothing else for it but arrest once an order's disobeyed. The Wing Commander was decent enough; he had to do his job though." He said it almost indifferently. "Why, you'd hardly expect them to give me a medal?"

She flared out:

"No, but they might have had the decency not to degrade you! They knew it wasn't cowardice; you'd saved that airman!"

He said after a while rather wearily:

"Oh, I know there's that side to it; but it's not that I mind."

"What is it you mind, then?"

He broke out angrily:

"The whole damnable system that ropes in men to do that sort of killing! You're not allowed a conscience; you're not allowed feelings. You've to be an inhuman automaton to loose those hellish bombs! . . . Oh, it's no good talking about it."

Gabrielle was insistent, however:

"They could refuse to do it?"

Michael had shrugged and said bitterly:

"Oh, they *could*. But there's a sort of horrible moral compulsion upon a man. It's pumped into you—'military necessity,' we've got to win the war, bombing's going to break Germany. . . . It's not the men who do it, it's the whole damn machinery behind it, hardening them into it."

She had been pushing him on; but it distressed her all the same to hear him. There was a shadow in the blue depths of her eyes as she asked the monk:

"Are we going to win the war?"

"Probably."

Something in his tone arrested her.

"Why do you ——. You sound almost indifferent."

"Because I don't think it will be peace."

"What's going to happen, then?"

Instead of answering the question he studied her for a moment:

"Why do you ask?"

"I suppose, because I'm young. So is Michael."

He saw what she meant. It was youth whom the future would concern. She said more explicitly: "We've grown up into a world in which anything may happen. One's almost afraid to look ahead. They're horribly cynical about things in the A.T.S."

"About the future?"

"Yes. What's the good of bringing children into the world if they're to be slaughtered in a few years? That kind of thing."

Michael, who had gone silent after his outburst, asked

whether it had been like this in the first war. Thornton told him:

"No. I think we all believed it would be the end of war. There was going to be a new world. The spirit's gone out of people this time."

"What's going to happen, Padre?"

It was the second time Gabrielle had asked it. He replied rather shortly: "I've only my own opinion, and it's not very encouraging," and then looked away through the window. They waited. He said at length, musingly:

"There's a kind of blind fear that things are not going to right themselves this time. I suppose it's partly the unconvincing ring in public utterances. It's in the Press, when they refer to the Atlantic Charter; there's a hollow sound about it." He lit the cigarette that Michael had handed him and dropped the match into an ash-tray. "I think people feel they're at the mercy of events. And they are—without God. The greatest living optimist wouldn't claim that the world is turning to God, or showing any inclination to do so. . . . I'm looking at things as they are, not as we'd like them to be. And they're shaping into a kind of terrible inevitability."

There was another wait. He seemed to be considering.

"There's nothing in the present ordering of things to hold the world together. It's almost as if human sanity were in abeyance. I should imagine sheer instinct for self-preservation will hold off another war for a time; sheer fear of what another war would be like. I can conceive a hideous vicious circle—governments piling up weapons for mass-destruction in the name of security, and every sane being knowing that if they're irrational enough to manufacture them they'll be irrational enough to use them; they're being used to an extent already. . . . If you can picture that state of things you can picture its effects on morale. Tension increasing. Every nation waiting. . . . I'm sorry, you two; I'd no intention of getting on to this."

Michael asked him firmly to go on. The monk thought for a moment.

"I've tried to form a conception of the world like that, the

sense of helplessness, God forgotten and ignored, all pretence of international morality laid aside — as it would be with mass-destruction in waiting; the world knowing that it was at its own mercy. Hate at large. A sudden panic, anything would be sufficient to precipitate things. I doubt if there would even be a declaration of war."

He paused.

"I'm only speculating, but I can imagine a spontaneous unloosing of everything that's evil — massacre on an incredible scale, cities wiped out mercilessly, no humane considerations. A frantic struggle for survival amidst universal chaos . . . I know it sounds like a nightmare, unreal, impossible. So would this present war if someone had pictured it last century."

He caught the distress in Gabrielle's face and added half apologetically:

"It's only my own conclusion. But there has been a warning, you know?"

"A warning?"

"If I announced in a railway carriage that on a day in 1917 the Creator gave a clear and unmistakable sign from heaven to seventy thousand people, in a manner which precluded any possibility of crowd hallucination, confirming a message about the future given by Our Lady to three small Portuguese children, how many in that railway carriage would believe it?"

He watched their faces.

"Nobody, I should imagine," Michael decided.

"And yet it happened on incontrovertible evidence."

Gabrielle said she had heard about it. The message, the monk enlightened her, contained a categorical statement of what was coming upon the world in the event of continued impenitence. It included the obliteration, not merely of cities but of whole nations. He asked Michael whether he had read the book on the manifestations of Fatima. Michael admitted that he had, twice. He had been disinclined to believe it at first; ultimately however he had found the evidence terribly compelling.

"Why isn't the whole world told about it?" Gabrielle asked.  
"Would they believe?"

She remained still.

"No, I suppose they wouldn't."

"Millions do know about it; but do you ever see a word of it in the Press? No, and you won't. Silence."

The monk stubbed out his cigarette.

"What is it you find difficult to believe?" he asked her.

"God ending things in that hideous way."

"God won't end things in that hideous way. It will be left to the world to do it of itself. And there's nothing to prevent the world turning to God at any moment and averting it. . . End things? No, not necessarily. The message doesn't say that. It ends on a note of triumph. Resurrection."

She remained thinking.

"Will Michael and I see the resurrection?"

It gave him the clue to her reluctance. She was envisioning the shadow of what might lie ahead casting its gloom over their married life. Michael replied for him:

"Gabrielle, how on earth can he answer that? Damn it all, we've got the Faith!"

She laid her head against his shoulder: "I know. But you're right up miles above me now. You're all spiritualised, and nothing matters. . . I'll be bringing children into the world."

"Yes, mother." He kissed her on the forehead. "And there's an Almighty Who knows all the answers. Listen, Gabrielle." He pulled the newspaper cutting from his pocket again, studied it and found what he wanted.

"You mustn't mind this, Padre."

He read aloud:

". . . Someone Who, looking down in pity on us, came down from His throne in heaven, took upon Himself our human nature and became Man; Someone, to Whom all is present; Someone Who, in the garden of His Agony two thousand years ago, accepted a cup containing all the anguish of this war and drank of that cup to the dregs, enduring unto death the

hideousness He never made; but Who did make dawn and sunset, stars and sunlight, and songs of birds, and flowers.

“‘And Whose everlasting arms still hold this world.’”

They had gone to inspect the preparations on the estate for the Land Army. The monk had watched them disappear through the trees beyond the Rockery and then strolled down here to the summer-house and ensconced himself in a deck-chair. . .

The sun was lowering to the west. He could see in the far distance a clump of barrage balloons caught by its rays, glinting mysteriously, remindingly.

He was wondering.

Why had he said all that? Without a qualm?

Gabrielle had been insistent on his opinion. He had given it, as he had given it to others when asked, driven by the strength of his own conviction and the urge within him to blazon the truth of Fatima. One couldn’t be silent over that stupendous intervention of the Creator. It was just that.

She had said at the end, “I’d sooner know what you really think, even if it hurts,” and then repeated to herself, “‘Whose everlasting arms still hold this world.’ I’m going to say that every day.”

They were young, with life before them, marriage. “I’ll be bringing children into the world.” There were thousands like them, weary of slaughter and massacre, asking for no more than security of human existence. There had been thousands of them after the first World War, lulled into false security, “bright young things” without a thought for the morrow, jazzing, packing shows and cinemas, dance-halls, “experiencing life,” living for the day — let the future take care of itself. The future had taken care of itself; their children were now being massacred in their turn. It would be the same again if the future were left to itself, and it would be unless the whole concept of life were changed. He had meant it in truth — that blind fear that things were not going to right themselves this

time. It was everywhere, expressing itself in cynical pessimism. The fear might be salutary, but the blindness was deadly. Blindness to a clear issue.

God, or a cataclysmic descent into the abyss. . .

It was the cruel concealment of that clear issue from a generation that had inherited its Godlessness, and would pass on its Godlessness to the next. Irreligion accepted for enlightenment. Faith dubbed a superstition. Every effort for a better world stultified from the start.

He wondered. Would Christian charity ultimately cease, and every man's hand be against his brother? Men no longer keepers of their brethren?

God help the world that man had made without Him!

The monk's eyes wandered over the garden.

Flowers closing with the setting sun. Birds in the trees quieting down. An occasional chatter of rooks from the elms. A squirrel appeared on the stone pathway, regarded the summer-house suspiciously, and scampered away over the lawn. It was very still here in Michael's garden; he could hear the faint tinkle of the stream in the distance.

He smiled to himself, remembering yesterday evening—Michael envisaging another long wait for Gabrielle. This evening—there was to be no long wait; they would be married in a few weeks' time.

A chapter in life ended; another chapter begun.

Gabrielle who had meant nothing to him until she suddenly meant everything in the world; Michael who had meant everything to her, even in those days on board, for all her inability to understand him . . . Now she wouldn't have him other than he was . . . "doing these things" because he "had to" . . . detesting them being known . . . saving but never destroying. . .

It had cost him his arm and his looks.

Michael the gardener.

Who would remain one.

They were marrying under the shadow of a vast evil, with no illusions of a tranquil sunlit life ahead. There would be no

blind drifting, neither would they falter by the way . . . until the day of dawning when the shadows of earth flee away. . .

He awakened to the sound of voices carrying on the still evening air. Michael and Gabrielle were returning.

They appeared on the pathway leading from the trees, again like two children, hand in hand.

The monk saw them stop, watching something. Michael went forward by himself to where a squirrel was sitting up, tilting its nose enquiringly. Its head turned sideways in doubt; but the magnetic attraction prevailed. Michael was talking to it in a low voice, tickling its nose with his finger. . . "Hullo, mate" . . .

They came along to the top of the Rockery steps and stood there, Gabrielle with the empty sleeve about her neck. Michael pointed in silence until she saw it. . .

A last ray of the sun resting on the Crucifix carved in the gable of the house. The arms of the Christus outstretched. Keeping the peace of Hollingham . . .

From the distance came the wail of the sirens.















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